

If Not Now, When?



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IF NOT NOW, WHEN?

*Toward a Reconstitution
of the Jewish People*

CONVERSATIONS BETWEEN
MORDECAI M. KAPLAN
AND ARTHUR A. COHEN

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CONTENTS

Preface <i>by Arthur A. Cohen</i>	7
Conversations Between Mordecai M. Kaplan and Arthur A. Cohen	13
Epilogue <i>by Mordecai M. Kaplan</i>	133

PREFACE

NO MAN IS WITHOUT the season of his discontents. Mine was the autumn of 1971, a distracted and unproductive time. And the High Holy Days approached, a special season within my season of despair. It was in its own way therefore a practical miracle that in the midst of a morning of gloom I should have called Rabbi Mordecai M. Kaplan, who, I had been told, had been trying to reach me without success (my writing office was obscurely listed in the telephone directory).

We had known one another. The late Rabbi Milton Steinberg had brought me to visit him one summer morning in 1948 when he was living in Westport, Connecticut. All that I can remember from that time is that I took issue with everything he said, virtually everything. The one thing with which no issue could be taken was the presence of the man—the vigor and the passion, the lively eyes, always probing, his expressive hands, and the voice, which seemed to arise ageless from a primeval cavern. With such a man one might disagree; one could not dismiss him. I am afraid that in my youth I had two temptations in the presence of authority—the wish to obliterate it or to capitulate. Both of course are unrealistic. The authority of Mordecai M. Kaplan is one which cannot be dismissed. To some he may be traitor and to others fool, but both mistake the essential greatness of a great man, that there is a single-minded preoccupation with making known and clarifying his own truth and refusing,

Preface

despite all the attraction of alternative argument, to change or alter the center core of conviction. Kaplan has stuck to his vision of the truth. When he was my teacher at the Jewish Theological Seminary of America, I fought him with my eyes, because in those days, four years after our first meeting, I had not changed my views of Judaism and saw no point in arguing with such a brilliant, temperamental, powerful teacher. Quite the contrary, my views had strengthened. I was well on my way to the formation of my own unalterable core of conviction. I formalized my opposition to Kaplan's Reconstructionist interpretation of Jewish life in the chapter devoted to his thought in my book *The Natural and the Supernatural Jew*. It was an all-out attack and I have not seen fit to revise it, but nonetheless one honors men who speak out their truth, and honoring him still, it was my delight that he invited me into conversation with him that morning. Past ninety years of age, he had no wish to postpone our meetings until the conclusion of the High Holy Days. We began a few days before Rosh Hashanah and concluded our meetings in the days that followed the Festival of Booths.

What strikes me now in retrospect about these conversations was their mood. The dining table with a bowl of fruit, the gentle and witty Mrs. Kaplan with a cup of black coffee readied for my arrival, and Mordecai, moving out of his study down the corridor into the room, but slightly bowed, smiling a continuously happy smile that we had come together to deliberate. Occasionally he would motion impatiently for me to turn off the recording device so that he could go to his library—which was everywhere, in every room—to find some book from which to read me something that seemed relevant (he reminded me in this of Milton Steinberg, my own first teacher in Israel, who treated his books like intimate friends with whom he had unceasing exchange) and then instructed, we would resume. I would tire after an hour or more, but Mordecai was always anxious to press further, to extenuate and elaborate, to refine

Preface

and think again. But throughout the many hours of our meetings and the four weeks over which our conversations stretched—from September 10, 1971 until their conclusion on October 7, 1971—our attention to each other did not flag or weary. I was struck constantly by the fact that we both listened, listened hard to each other. We rarely scribbled notes, infrequently did we interrupt. We had no wish to score points from each other, to raise welts with wit. The task was other—to speak out over the nearly fifty years which separated us in age and the centuries that separated us in background and worlds that separated us in modes of thought to a common passion and a common concern—our love for the Jewish people and our wish that it be made whole, creative, and enduring. In a real sense both of our lives were staked upon that conviction, that the game was worth the candle, that the work of the Jewish people was not yet done.

It is not that these conversations have effected any great change of mind, for mind is a dimension of character and mind changes as slowly as character. Mordecai Kaplan still misunderstands my so-called supernaturalism and I suspect his social-psychological naturalism. The fact that we continue to have reservations about each other's essential *docta* does not obscure our coming together in recognition of the severe crisis of the Jewish people. I do not think our conversations settle the matter, but they do raise solid questions and give voice to the primary issues.

In offering these conversations to the public it is our hope, Mordecai Kaplan's and my own, that others will be inspired to take up the challenge, to think again about their self-conception as Jews or, if not Jews (imagining that these conversations will interest non-Jewish readers as well), that they will be emboldened to recognize the destinarian enthusiasm of the Jewish people which wishes no less for the peace and salvation of the nations than it strives for its own.

ARTHUR A. COHEN

April 11, 1972

CONVERSATIONS BETWEEN
MORDECAI M. KAPLAN
AND
ARTHUR A. COHEN

September 10, 1971

KAPLAN. I regard you, Arthur Cohen, as the keenest critic of the Reconstructionist version of Judaism. However, being by nature open-minded, I wish to engage with you in dialogue in the hope that, even though I expect to retain my belief in that version of Judaism, I might discover the need for qualifying or elaborating some aspects of it. There are, however, certain principles of Reconstructionism which I wish to clarify immediately in order to forestall any misunderstanding concerning it on the part of either of us.

In proposing the conception of Judaism as an evolving religious civilization, I do not wish to convey the impression that it is the only correct and authentic version of Judaism, thereby implying that other versions are incorrect and inauthentic. The very attempt to depart from tradition is based on democracy rather than theocracy as a form of polity. Democracy has to be compatible with religious pluralism. Hence, in the Judaism of the future, obliged as it is to be compatible with democracy, there must be room for religious pluralism.

Accordingly, the Reconstructionist version of Judaism is intended for those Jews who, like myself, wish to retain their Jewish identity but who do not find themselves religiously at

If Not Now, When?

home in any of the existing denominations. The number of such Jews is legion. Why not offer then some plausible version of Judaism like that of Reconstructionism, so that they might come to experience their Jewish identity as a source of personal happiness, and the Jewish people would be enhanced through their belonging to it? Reconstructionism is, in fact, a method of coping with a crisis in public religion in general, as well as with the present rebellion of youth against the contemporary functioning of Western civilization.

The rebellion of youth is directed against all control through law and authority, and on behalf of absolute individualism. Reconstructionism, on the other hand, proposes that we challenge all forms of belief which are based on implicit faith in tradition, without, however, breaking completely with it. Tradition should be challenged only insofar as it runs counter to normal human behavior. Reconstructionism is likewise a refusal to be associated with any form of personal experience that is mystical or incommunicable. So far the negative aspect of Reconstructionism.

As to its positive aspect, that can best be expressed by demythologizing traditional religion and resorting to the psychosocial formula of human nature, which the great Jewish sage Hillel of the first pre-Christian century enunciated. He said, "If I am not for myself who will be for me? But if I am only for myself what am I? And if not now, when?" That implies that for the human species—individually and collectively—to experience the meaning and fulfillment of life, it has to be in a position to satisfy its three kinds of needs. Those of individuality, those of mutual responsibility, and those of relevant action—relevant, that is, to the particular age in which one lives.

The idea of God is the assumption that there is enough in the world to meet men's needs but not enough to satiate their lusts and their greeds. That is the case because of the inherent organicity of the universe and of each of its individual components, however minute or vast in size. The idea of God is, in such a view, a correlate of the idea of salvation or human ful-

fillment. The idea of God as such is a part of wisdom.

The term "God" is a functional and not a substantive noun. It is, therefore, not only *compatible* with the dictates of reason and of intelligence; the fact is that in order for the God idea to be mature, it has to *reckon* with both reason and intelligence. Consequently, general principles of religion should be formulated not in terms of a creed but in terms of those wants which are free from lust and greed. For a religious tradition that goes back thirty-five centuries to function in keeping with that idea of God, it has to be reinterpreted in terms of the formula expressed by Hillel concerning human nature, a formula in keeping with the most contemporary insights of the behavioral sciences.

COHEN. It seems to me that the critical center of the position that you have stated (as lucidly and integrally as everything you have argued throughout your long life) is that there is a positive value in the survival of any civilization that has demonstrated, by its moral courage and its intellectual strength, that it has the capacity to survive. Clearly the Jewish people has demonstrated those virtues. No one would deny this; even those anti-Semites that exist and will undoubtedly exist to the end of time would begrudgingly acknowledge that they are up against a distinguished enemy, and a distinguished enemy which has not only the capacity of will but the imagination to revise its existence time in, time out, surviving one tragedy and going on to rebuild the possibilities of new futures and new possibilities. There is no need to remonstrate with T. S. Eliot who would prevent too great an abundance of freethinking Jews in the Christian society, or with Arnold Toynbee who would insist that the Jews be a fossil because his reading of history demands that they be one, nor even with those more contemporaneous and unsophisticated (because unconscious) anti-Semites who would have Jewish people relegated to a role essentially tributary and servant to the grand design (as yet

If Not Now, When?

unarticulated) of Western civilization and its evolution. It is not necessary to demonstrate to others that we have the genius for survival, but it is absolutely critical that we demonstrate to ourselves that the genius for survival is authentically our own. The real problem of the Jewish people is a crisis not of unbelief but of disbelief. Not unbelief that it has the capacity or the will but disbelief that it has, in fact, done what it has said it would do, namely, to endure and to thrive. When I reflect upon what I described in Israel recently (to the embarrassment and confusion both of the Israeli Jews and their American counterparts) as Jewish triumphalism, namely, the assumption of self-righteous belief, the unarticulated presumption that we have brought ourselves to this time and season as if *only* by our hands and as if *only* by the might of the sword, intelligence, gift, cleverness, wit, wisdom, or the unconscious of the race. There is for me always the mystery of the unsaid and the inarticulate.

One of my fundamental disagreements with you has always been that you have wanted to make reality more rational than I believed it could be made. It was not that I had contempt for your conception of God. That would be impossible. I might have felt that twenty years ago in my youth when I fought with you as a student at the Jewish Theological Seminary, but I could not do that now for the reason that I recognize how excruciatingly difficult it is to give expression to what is most profound in life. It is relatively easy to inflate triviality. It is exceedingly difficult to be sharp, precise, clear about the ultimate, about ultimate questions or ultimate reality. Of course, part of the pathos of being a leader, as you have been all of your life, and part of the situation of being an imaginative writer, as I have been most of my life, is that people demand of *you* that you explicate, whereas they only ask of me that I tell. The difference in obligation is enormous, and the perplexity of being a leader is one that I both envy and thank God that I'm spared

from. It is a horrendous predicament. It is a horrendous predicament having to tell the truth all the time as though one knows it. Congregants, parishioners, casual people, are continually asking that one state one's position succinctly, stripped of all the nuance and complexity that makes it a position, like Hillel to the pagan; whereas in fact, finally, the answer that Hillel gave after his simple formulation—Go away and think—is the only right answer. The predicament of most people is their unwillingness to engage the ultimate questions but their wish to have the answer.

So let me take it back, if I may, one step and indicate that for me the great difference between our two views of Jewish civilization, its potentiality and its future, results from the fact that undoubtedly we—and in this you can correct my presumption—came to Jewish existence from two different ends, from two different points of inception and origin. This is not to say that these points of inception and origin don't overlap, don't share common characteristics and preconceptions, but they are nonetheless vastly different.

How is a human being conditioned to think about the universe? Why is it that some people ask questions and know that they will never have answers and other people demand answers without ever having posed the question? How is it that there are people of the older generation, not yourself specifically, who can regard the rebellion of youth as though it were a consummate arrogance against the civilization they were given, rather than regarding it as the occasion of new beginnings in human existence? There are those who will always regard any breach in the walls that they build around themselves as a threat rather than as the opportunity for new light to enter. I am happily poised between the generations having been raised in the holocaust generation, not having experienced the catastrophe of the depression except in the most tangential sense, being a child of a thriving middle-class family, knowing a kind

If Not Now, When?

of security from my childhood which was nevertheless coupled with an ongoing insecurity, an awareness that the world was collapsing but that I was eating well.

I've told this story many times but I will tell it to you specifically because it seems to me of relevance to many of the things that we will be talking about in our conversation. I have not been able to document the fact; all that I rely upon is its memory. But it is my recollection that in the early forties a rally was held at Madison Square Garden to which Chaim Weizmann spoke (but for all I remember it might well have been Rabbi Stephen Wise). My memory tells me that it was Chaim Weizmann, and I was a boy of fifteen, holding the hand of my father and hearing Weizmann announce that word had just been received that two million Jews were dead. Sobs broke out about me and my father began to cry, and all that I can remember was that I burst into tears, not knowing what it meant for two million people to die but knowing that that man next to me was my father and indeed he might have died and indeed I might have died and indeed the twenty thousand Jews who crowded Madison Square Garden all might have been) dead. It came to me at that moment and has stayed with me all my life, that the commitment to values that define any civilization makes one liable to the distaste and loathing of the world, that the holding of any truth makes oneself vulnerable, whether it is an individual truth or the posture of a nation, whether it is the values of civilization or whether it is the belief in God. Ultimate truth carries with it ultimate vulnerability.

In a certain sense, therefore, the first premise of my contention with you, Dr. Kaplan, is my fear that we can never tie Jewish existence to any social or political polity as though that polity had a strength and indominability which would sustain us rather than we sustaining it. In effect I am taking issue with the underlying theme of much of your writing, which has been to tie the religious civilization of the Jewish people to the democratic polity.

KAPLAN. Now I am beginning to understand exactly why, despite differences in our general outlook on life, you express appreciation of my efforts in behalf of Judaism, an appreciation of which I was indeed aware when I suggested that we engage in this dialogue. The basic reason for those differences is the fact that you and I have come to Jewish life in radically different ways. The incident that you mentioned, and the way you interpreted it, accounts for our disagreement with regard to the way to deal with the problem of religion in general and Jewish religion in particular. You came to Jewish life at a most tragic point of its existence. You did not have the opportunity as a child to share the full and normal life-style of the Jewish people. Therefore when the awareness of your Jewish identity came to you the way it did, it inevitably led to the conclusion that the fact of your Jewish identity, no matter how true it might sound, was vulnerable.

COHEN. Let me just interject that it isn't the *truth* that's vulnerable; it is holding a truth that makes one vulnerable. Every human being is vulnerable by self-definition; in Spinoza's formulation, all definition is negation. What he means by that, if I understand him correctly, is that in order to define anything we begin by clarifying what it is not. Consequently, all truth has a character of exclusivity as one of its properties; that is to say, it is one thing and not another thing. But even more, a social truth—and all religious truths have social dimensions. The espousal of any religious truth makes one vulnerable. That's essentially what I am saying. It's not the truth that's vulnerable, but the human beings who hold truths make themselves vulnerable by holding them. Unless their espousal be such a puny thing as to accommodate all others, the holding remains vulnerable.

KAPLAN. Is not, on the other hand, the acceptance of one's identity an answer to the need to find meaning and purpose to

If Not Now, When?

one's life? An answer to a need is not in itself a matter of truth, although it has to be compatible with truth. The experience of social identity is like the experience of hunger, not like the knowledge of mathematical truths, such as two plus two equalling four.

What you say about vulnerability is true about ideas of reason but not ideas of wisdom.

COHEN. Tell me the difference.

KAPLAN. To understand the difference we have to examine the nature of human experience as such.

There are three kinds of experience—needs, facts, deeds. Needs give rise to values. The sense for values constitutes wisdom. A value is that which a human being needs to acquire as a prerequisite to survival. The purpose of value is to render existence endurable. There is a hierarchy of values. Social or religious identity is perhaps a first priority. Unlike intellectual facts, social or religious identity is normally acquired in one's home upbringing, at a time when the imagination is unrestrained and is abetted by feeling. Our biblical ancestors managed in their wisdom to anticipate some of the most important moral and spiritual dimensions of life. However, the Greeks were the first to be concerned with problems of reality and appearance and with problems of *how* to think. It was only when philosophy gave way to science that people began learning *what* to think, and only then did they begin to learn what to think concerning human behavior. They then began to understand the function of religion and the meaning of God. It is of the very nature of philosophy as such to render one who indulges its pursuit *vulnerable*. What is philosophy if not the immaculate conception of thought not sired by experience?

Truths of value are the subject matter of wisdom. Wisdom deals with factors; reason deals with facts; intelligence deals with artifacts. God is not merely a fact; God is a factor. God

creates facts. A true conception of God is a conception of organicity or analogous process that makes for salvation or fulfillment. Much of the misunderstanding concerning the meaning of God would be avoided if it were generally recognized that even in the traditional use of that term, it has a *functional* rather than a substantive meaning. Thus we have the biblical text which reads: "I am the Lord your God who brought you out of the land of Egypt to *be* your God." Doesn't that imply that to be God, he needs a people of whom to be God?

COHEN. I think it also implies a rather fundamental distinction within the tradition between God as creator and God as revealer. One of the things that I particularly love in Rosenzweig's discussion of the reality of God in his *The Star of Redemption* is the recognition that the distinction between God the creator and God the revealer is rather too sharp in traditional theology. The assumption that the creating God is not also a revealing God and that the revealing God is not also a creating God at one and the same time is mistaken. The God who brought the people of Israel out of the land of Egypt to be their God was not only revealing himself to the people and calling the people to himself, convoking the people as the object of the act, but at the same time was exhibiting an undisclosed aspect of himself. The notion in classical theology (which I dislike as much as you do) that God is *being* alone, *ens entissimus*, and that history is somehow oppositive to the divine nature; that God concedes to history, condescends himself to it, seems to me meaningless and defeating.

God needs history. God needs his creatures. God as creator requires as much the thing that he creates as he does the capacity to create.

The creation of the universe and the giving of the Torah are part of the same continuum of self-expression. God's nature demands self-expression as profoundly as his creatures demand it. But I think in this sense we may not be as far apart as we

If Not Now, When?

were once, because I regard the relation between God and history as transactional.

KAPLAN. I suspect you haven't caught the full implication of what I said with regard to the functional meaning of the term "God." The function which we ascribe to God must be a *conceivable* one. Such is not necessarily the case with the philosophical conception of God as creator, especially if it is understood as *creatio ex nihilo*, creation out of nothing. In the Aristotelian conception, God is a *molder*, not a "creator," though the term "creator" might be applied to him in a figurative sense.

The case is otherwise with history and nationhood. The people of Israel was the first people to discover the God of history. The actual revelation of God took place not amid the thunder and lightning on Mt. Sinai but in "the still small voice" of Israel's sense of human history. This accounts for the impact which, alone, Israel's conception of God has had on the religions of mankind. To translate all that into literal terms, we have to learn to understand the phenomenon of religion itself in terms of human experience as developed by Emile Durkheim in his *The Elementary Forms of the Religious Life*.

Permit me, at this point, to summarize as briefly as possible what the phenomenon of religion has come to mean to me. I assume that it arose from the natural tendency of human beings to function collectively in the fulfillment of their common biological needs, particularly those related to sustenance and physical self-perpetuation. The use of a totem to represent the source of sustenance would usually serve as a rallying symbol for the family, clan, or tribe. The totem came to be regarded as a god. The only people that in ancient times preferred to use a *name* rather than a *totem* as a rallying symbol was ancient Israel.

The name itself, YHWH, suggested the idea of history. The interpretation of it given in the Book of Exodus (3:14) implies the "unchanging," as stated in Malachi (3:6), and refers to the fact that YHWH's function is to be with the people of Israel at

all times and under all circumstances. That YHWH is such a god is confirmed by the fact that he is actually represented as having entered into a covenant with each of the three founders of the people of Israel—Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. Consequent to the historical function of religion as conceived by the people of Israel, it naturally follows that the unique characteristics of its religion, namely, monotheism, ethical nationhood, and an interest in the future of mankind as a whole reflects the most religiously creative period of the ancient people of Israel, known now as the Jewish people.

The problem which confronts us Jews at the present time is a twofold one. First and foremost is the need of identifying ourselves with the biblical people of Israel, not by means of racial identity but civilizational identity. A civilization is the life-style of a self-governing, self-educative, and self-perpetuating society. Until the beginning of the nineteenth century, we were that kind of a society. As a result of desegregation and enlightenment, the Jewish people has been disintegrating and becoming assimilated in ever larger numbers to the nations to which it has come to belong.

Those of us Jews who wish to prevent the disappearance of the Jewish people are confronted with the twofold task of demythologizing the Bible (so as to arrive at an understanding of the factual character of the Jewish past as constituting a social heritage worthy of dedicating ourselves to its cultivation) and secondly of implementing the conditions in the environment necessary to our becoming once again a self-governing, self-educative, and self-perpetuating society. To achieve those two objectives, Judaism, or that which unites Jews of all generations, has to be understood and transmitted as nothing less than an evolving religious civilization.

If you are to cooperate with me in this venture, it would be necessary for you to accept as the source of the Jewish God idea, not that of philosophy which you probably acquired in the course of your advanced studies but the unique collective his-

If Not Now, When?

torical experience of the Jewish people. As a rule, the normal way of acquiring that Jewish approach is in an intensively Jewish home environment during one's childhood years. Knowing you, however, to be open-minded, I count upon your accepting my suggestion.

COHEN. Everything that you say has a ring of historical authenticity. I wouldn't deny that for a minute. But let me take the issue from an entirely different point of view. Not that we are not talking about the same issue, because we are. Clearly it was in fact the case that my entrance into Jewish life was by an external fact of catastrophic importance which implicated my existence in a web of history to which I had virtually no previous indoctrination or exposure. Judaism was for me (and I suspect for millions of my contemporaries) a traumatic episode. It was not an episode formed by the fluency of historical generations, by the bequest of legacies, by the teaching of an inheritance. There was, as far as Jewish life was concerned, an historical chasm which was created by the decimation of the Jewish people and not yet rectified by the creation (or re-creation) of the Jewish community here or in the land of Israel. It can be said, therefore, of every Jew alive this day under the age of fifty that, unless he was fortunate to have come to Jewish life in calmer times and under calmer auspices, he confronts Judaism as a traumatic center. It would even seem relevant at this juncture to introduce and to comment upon the observation that Arthur Koestler made many years ago that the time had come for the Jewish people to liquidate itself as a separate enclave whose meaning and value could no longer be articulated before the world other than in the context of martyrdom and destruction. Obviously Koestler's position is not my own, but then neither is my position capable of being linked as wholeheartedly as I might wish to the collective consciousness of the Jewish people or, for that matter, the consciousness of any people.

I think this is an important point to stress and elaborate. The predicament of my generation and, in fact, most particularly my predicament as one who regards himself essentially as a writer whose life is conducted in the imagination and who is continuously bending effort to fabricate in the imagination a fiction which is more reality than the reality which I regard as fictional. The predicament of my generation, the generation which is now post-Holocaust, post-Hiroshima and Nagasaki and, God willing, in our time, post-Vietnam, is a generation beset by the apparent collapse of the normative power and ethical imperative of those civilizations which represented themselves in the West as the highest expression of the intellectual and moral intentionality of civilized man.

I would like to retrace my argument to almost the starting point of your remarks that you have just completed. I suspect you take Greek philosophy too seriously and Greek paganism not seriously enough. The birth of Hebrew religion and the Jewish tradition which comes out of that religion can only be seen against the background of an ambience, an intellectual, moral, social ambience, that was pagan in character—not necessarily philosophic, but pagan.

KAPLAN. Mythology?

COHEN. I would give to the spirit of paganism more than the dreams of myth.

What I mean by that is this. The sense of the primordial universe antedates the birth of Greek philosophy in the sixth and seventh centuries. That earlier world was one in which the gods were engaged in the affairs of mortal men. The Greeks had a sense of the interpenetration of nature and human life. Nature and human life were not separate spheres. They were interpenetrating domains. And the gods operated to create both order and imbalance in the affairs of men, in order both to illuminate them as well as purposively to confuse them.

If Not Now, When?

One of the characteristics of the pagan spirit was the sense that man, by virtue of his finitude, was not entitled to clarity. In fact, the presumption of clarity was an offense against the order of the universe. The Greek notion of *hubris* was the awareness of giving offense to the buffer zone which existed between the kingdom of the gods and the kingdom of mortals. *Hubris* was that impetus in man which led him to receive his humanity and to pretend to the rights of the gods. What happened in Greek philosophy whether with Heraclitus or with Parmenides or later with Socrates, Plato, Aristotle, was that somehow the individual thinker emerged from this welter of humanity, from the *polis* of Greek society, and tried to seize the essence of the confusion, the confusion of realms. Whether the confusion of realms was the confusion between nature and man or between the sphere of the finite and the sphere of the indefinite (the Greeks hardly ever spoke about the infinite but conceived the realm of the gods as being more the realm of the indefinite), the Greeks didn't really know who the gods were; the gods were supervenient but not explicit and clear as they later became.

If we wish to make the Greeks accountable, we must make the Greek philosophic tradition responsible for the attempt to find the noumenon. They tried to isolate essences. But not less than the Greeks, at the same time, there was a people in the Middle East dealing with the problem of paganism in an entirely different way than Greek philosophy. The ancient Israelites were confronting the problem of paganism by trying to elaborate a sense of history. The real genius of the ancient Hebrews was that, unlike the Greeks, history was no longer conceived as the fortunes of the particular race but rather the Jewish people conceived itself—in both pride and arrogance—as the paradigm for the destiny of mankind. The Jews simply weren't bothered by the problem that troubled the Greeks, that is, the problem of *hubris*, because the Jews were prepared to ask questions about the destiny of man: What should a man do? How should he

conduct his life? How should he respond to nature? And how should he be obedient to the rhythm of the universe?

The Greeks were interested in noumena. The Jews were interested in the numinal. The essence that became, for the Greek, the First Idea, God as the uncaused cause, the prime mover, *actus purus*, *intellectus agens*, all of the terms by which the intellectual primordiality of God was developed in Greek philosophy becomes numinous reality and, therefore, sacred reality in Jewish experience—no less a recognition of the primordiality of God, no less a recognition of God in his singularity. uniqueness, aloneness, but coupled with an awareness that there was somehow a whole participation between this ultimate being who cared for these creatures and these creatures who assumed obligations of trust and loyalty in return for his solicitude.

I am terribly concerned, as you can imagine, with the fact that if I am a *person*, the law of my nature must be not only a law but must be a person as well. That is to say, my argument with you has always been that you make God an idea which is contingent to the requirement of the collective consciousness rather than, as I would insist, a reality who exists in transactional relationship with me. The divine-human continuum extends between persons. There is a modus of mutual address in which my aspiration is raised up to a person who hears, cares, is concerned, and in consequence seeks to energize the destiny of the historical.

KAPLAN. On the other hand, I assume that Jewish theology is emphatically averse to treating all human traits ascribed to God as other than metaphorical. The difference is that for paganism a god functioned mainly as a form of power, whereas for Judaism God functioned mainly as spirit, i.e., "the way of YHWH to act responsibly in terms of law" (cf. Gen. 18). From the standpoint of reason, any ascription of anthropomorphic personality to the cosmic God must be negated. The very purpose of Maimonides in his *Guide for the Perplexed* is to prove

If Not Now, When?

that all we can know about God is what he is *not* and not what he is. What you say about *hubris* in Greek mythology plays a prominent role in biblical mythology as well. And is spelled out in the scripture "Man's heart contrives evil from his infancy" (Gen. 8:21). In fact the phrase "knowledge of good and evil" is equated with *hubris*. It means that the human being, insofar as he thinks he is mature enough to know the difference between good and evil, actually plays god.

September 14, 1971

KAPLAN. Your response to my introductory remarks concerning the purpose of our dialogue helped to clarify the direction which it should take. Your response virtually accounts for your tendency to accept supernaturalism instead of naturalism or humanism as a basis for religion and the belief in God. You mentioned two facts which, to my mind, account for that tendency. In the first place you stated that your home training during your childhood was religiously negative. Secondly, you mentioned the traumatic experience at Madison Square Garden on hearing Weizmann announce that more than two million Jews had been cruelly done to death by the Nazis; the trauma of your sudden discovery that being a Jew meant being the victim of mankind's inhumanity.

There is, however, the possibility of conceiving Jewish religion in terms of human experience. Moreover, conceiving democracy as currently the most desirable form of government, it should be possible to conceive of the Jews united for many secular interests that, as a people, they share in common. It is regrettable that the scientific study of human nature, human behavior, has been diverted from making progress in the art of living by the discovery of the extent to which the individual is

If Not Now, When?

dominated by his unconscious. Many problems in the art of living would by this time have been understood much better if sociology and anthropology had demonstrated concerning human behavior that which has of late come to be recognized as in need of being taken into account. I refer to the fact that the individual is far from being a self-contained entity but that he is an inseparable segment of a group whole. Likewise a civilized group entity is such insofar as it is an inseparable segment of a larger civilized group. A family has status insofar as it is a segment of a clan, a clan of a tribe, etc.

Moreover, institutional or public religion is a manifestation of group consciousness and therefore functions in the individual insofar as it renders him aware of his belonging to a religious sect. As a rule, some visible object in the heavens above or upon the earth beneath would serve as the rallying medium for the adherents of a religion. However, the unique and contrasting character of the Jewish religion has been manifest in two distinctive traits. When, instead of some visible object serving as the rallying standard for the people of Israel, the personal name, YHWH (by which, according to the Torah, he made himself known to Moses), a name which means "eternality," came to serve it as the inspiriter of cohesion, a new dimension in the natural development of religion was realized. This innovation explains why the group consciousness of ancient Israel deliberately aimed at self-perpetuation. The goal of self-perpetuation generated both a sense of history and a collective conscience such as no other people in the ancient world is known to have manifested.

In modern times, as a result of the political revolutions we have witnessed as well as of man's scientific and technological progress, the Jewish people has been disintegrating and is being either destroyed or absorbed by the various populations that have been harboring it. Therefore the problem of surviving Jews is how to cope with that situation and how to save the Jewish

people from extinction. The only way is for the Jewish people to recover its group consciousness and conscience.

The segment of the Jewish people which still subscribes to the supernaturalist version of its history is rapidly diminishing. However, given the humanist version of Jewish historic group consciousness and conscience, the most important activity for Jews to engage in would be to proceed with its formal self-reconstitution as a self-governing, self-educative, and self-perpetuating people. To achieve that would require the formulation of a new constitution for the Jewish people which would spell out in some detail the duties and responsibilities entailed by membership in it. It should be observed, before advancing my position further, that the personal name YHWH, by being demythologized and reinterpreted as the consciousness and conscience of the Jewish people, is justified by the following facts:

One, throughout the Bible the belief in God is assumed to be not a matter of group faith but of experience manifest as group wisdom. Group wisdom is a sense of values or priorities—although shared by a group.

Two, the God who is the object of Jewish belief is conceived as being near and generally accessible. It would follow from this that there is nothing mystical or metaphysical in that experience.

Three, a large number of Jewish cultic practices are ascribed to YHWH as their source; whereas, in fact, they emanate from rabbinic authorities who gave voice to Jewish group conscience.

Four, in the rabbinic writings, the name YHWH is never used. Instead God is referred to as *Shekhinah* which means Divine Presence. The source of that usage is a statement in the Book of Exodus that God commanded Moses to order the building of a Tabernacle so that the Israelites might be assured of his presence among them. Hence follows the rabbinic apothegm: "Wherever the Jews are in exile the Divine Presence abides with them."

If Not Now, When?

Clearly then the group consciousness and group conscience of our forebears constituted their experience of God's presence.

COHEN. I am most profoundly struck by the fact that as all of us grow older our positions tend to coalesce rather than to diverge as dramatically as they did in one's youth, when one is more concerned with establishing his own identity to the exclusion of others, whatever their truth. It seems to me that in the position you are articulating now, there is no change in the familiar Kaplanian doctrine, but rather a moderation. You seem to be taking more account of the continuous oppression of reality as a factor in Jewish experience specifically and, indeed, in all of human experience.

I have no doubt that your appraisal of the crisis of modern Judaism is correct. I would never think to ascribe the crisis of the Jewish people to either God's desertion of the people or to their desertion of Him. Unfortunately reality is more complex than such transitory desertions. The traditional rabbinic interpretation of Jewish tragedy as compensation for the flight of Israel from its true home in God has certainly been demonstrated in our time to be at best a weak doctrine of history and at worst a psychologically malicious one. Unfortunately the tragedy of our people, no less than the tragedy of other peoples, cannot be ascribed so simply to a monistic doctrine of history and a simplistic doctrine of God. I would like therefore, if I can, to restate certain preconditions of your comments since, indeed, the basis of much of our historic disagreement is in fact the difference in our history.

I would qualify by saying that the environment out of which I came was not religiously negative. It was religiously empty. And emptiness is rather different than negativity. It was not that my parents had no love for the Jewish people. It was that they had no knowledge of how to show that love. They had neither the instruction of their background nor the

cooperation of the environment in which they raised their children to understand affirmative ways of expressing the commonality of group loyalty and the commonality that binds human beings to a great civilization. Indeed, I might add that an aspect of the pathos of American life is its insistence upon the enucleation of the deepest kind of human loyalties in the interest of consensus. I think of a close friend of mine, a second-generation American whose parents came from Germany in the days before Hitler, who remembers from his childhood the pleasure of hearing Goethe, Schiller, Herder read as the family literature in the original tongue. But by the time of his maturity all of that had given way to a flat English resonance, and the books of Goethe, Schiller, and Herder were to be read no more. There is in American life a passion to standardize which derives from the persuasion that the building of culture is not achieved by a revision of the fundamentals of culture but somehow by their initial obliteration into the melting pot. The melting pot does not melt. The predicament of Americans, not alone American Jews, is that the melting pot seethes but does not dissolve or reconcile individuated cultural identities.

Ethnicity *is* breaking down, not alone for Jews but for all Americans (and, in fact, as Earl Raab, the distinguished sociologist, has observed, the passion of Jews to preserve ethnicity has become the focus of a new kind of anti-Semitism stemming from those who are willingly acculturated). In the past, as we know, it would not be untypical for Irish to dislike Jews or Jews to dislike Italians or Italians to dislike Negroes on the premise that their ethnicities were mutually exclusive and hostile. But today the style is somewhat different. The problematic of our society is the passion to destroy *all* barriers to mutual infiltration. Consequent to this is that those who are most anucleated, most acculturated—that is, the young—struggle against ethnicity most profoundly. I have heard more young people (not their elders who have been traditional sources of

If Not Now, When?

anti-Semitism) hold in contempt the passion of Jews, or of any other ethnic minority, to maintain linguistic, cultural, religious vitalities and identities.

What we confront, then, is the experience of what it means to grow up in an environment that is valueless, not one that is against values but one that is, from the perspective of value, essentially neutral and empty.

I came not from a hostile environment but from one that was essentially neutral.

Secondly, there is no question—in my description and your clarification of the traumatic discovery—but that my identity with the Jewish people rendered me vulnerable as a Jew without at the same time affording me those values which made me invulnerable along with all Jews. It is the predicament of a valueless, neutral, empty environment combined with the trauma of vulnerability that gave me the sense that Judaism and the Jewish people were in fact a burden which had no compensation that could be historically justified. My later education, particularly my years at the University of Chicago, enabled me to discover that there was an articulate tradition in the West that held that values could be personal and not group values, that one's identity could be fashioned out of one's aloneness rather than in concert and community with one's fellows, that in fact the condition of aloneness was, by definition, an unshared condition. However, extrapolating beyond the fact of personal aloneness, one can argue that any unique people is in the identical situation as the unique individual. Radical aloneness is as much the condition of the Jewish people as it is the condition of the single Jew. The Jews make a principle of their aloneness in the world, and their pursuit of self-coherence and self-perpetuation is no different than the same pursuit in the lonely individual.

What I sought therefore in my reading of philosophy and my inquiries into the history of religion was a way to make my self-definition impervious. The real distortion from which I have suffered (and from which I imagine many intellectuals suffer,

particularly if they began, as I did, too early) is that the mind achieves a level of excellence while the spirit is desensitized. I achieved a measure of individual control and authority, but I lost contact with the human pulse.

Let me turn now to specific points that grow out of your general statement of the situation.

I regard the critical term in your presentation to be "humanism." You identify naturalism and humanism. I do not. I understand humanism to be the concept that allows both the supernatural and the natural sense of religious reality to exist together in coherence and without mutual destruction. The assumption that naturalism as a doctrine is *the* humane doctrine or that the naturalistic sense enables man to conduct life with a high degree of reasonableness, sensibility, awareness, a nonfratricidal, undogmatic, openness to the universe raises as many questions as it resolves. It is perfectly clear to me that the Jewish people, if it is to be an untrammelled people, will enjoy another great creative flowering, followed subsequently by yet another dissipation. Freedom, whatever its theoretical abstraction, is always particular, and of this freedom we must inquire for whose sake and for the sake of what is a man to be free. A man who is only free for himself, to gloss the apothegm of Hillel, would be a vain and useless man. We are obliged then to think of freedom in tension with social and historical limitations—and then the question whose limits and what limits becomes critical for any understanding of the naturalistic sense of freedom.

It is not alone or simply that I oppose naturalism; it is that I oppose any position that would make of naturalism the dogma that traditional theology made of supernaturalism. As I know you are aware, my criticism of your thought (and in fact the whole push and power of *The Natural and the Supernatural Jew*) was to indicate that there is a transaction between God and man in the medium of history—that is to say, God has an objective persona, objective to us as well as to himself, and that only if we can take him seriously as a God, can we take our-

If Not Now, When?

selves seriously as men. What I mean by that is that I could not possibly regard God as an idea because to regard God as an idea, however that idea might be an idea superior among equals (an idea better because inclusive of what men otherwise call truth, moral excellence, beauty), would nevertheless be a fiction created for the needs of my community. My vision of God would be simply a fictive means of enabling my community to cohere and hold itself together. It would be for me to make God into a function of the endurance of my existence as a Jew and as a human being. I think that there is a larger question.

The serious and unresolved issue that I have raised with you in my criticism of your thinking has been: What is the reason for the continued existence of the Jewish people? Until I can answer the question that the Jewish people exist because without the Jewish people and without the Jewish "idea," without the the notion of the Jewish "idea" as being an indestructible, impermeable asset to human civilization, we could not possibly, except on the narrowest atavistic grounds, continue to argue for the existence of the Jews. If it were simply the case, as Arthur Koestler has wittily and meanly proposed, that the Jews are a people who created their existence and now should will themselves out of existence because they've done their job and they've finished their work, we might agree, if it were only a question of the Jews in their natural mortality. Life might be less complicated, but it would also be less rich. One of the foci of my humanism is that in the transaction between God and a people certain values emerge as central to any concept of surviving, whether of the Jews or, I might add, of God. The interaction between both persons (and I speak now of the Jewish people as a person) is predicated upon the assumption that human life requires endless richness and creative possibilities; secondly, that it requires the witness of those who continuously take a stand on behalf of the future and who, however much they may look to the past, are finally future-oriented; thirdly, that the sense of futurity means that although we as individuals

contemplate daily the certainty of death, we at the same time recognize that as the eternity of God is eternal to us, we must be eternal to him. It is then a commitment to the eternity of the people. And lastly, the conviction of humanism entails that these three precedent visions of life be conducted without destroying any other person. Life has a sanctity even from the perspective of truth. I recollect in this context the observation of the French Catholic philosopher Etienne Gilson who, in a lecture on tolerance, observed that he never understood why tolerance was regarded as such a great virtue. He always thought that a man who was intolerant because he believed that he had been vouchsafed the truth but still forbore to kill another man for disagreeing with him represented a higher order of tolerance than the man whose premise was not absolute truth but social and political equability. This is, I think, the position that I have been arguing, as you know, in my most recent book, *The Myth of the Judeo-Christian Tradition*, which has caused annoyance among Jews and great realism and acceptance among non-Jews. There *is*, I argue, theological enmity between Jews and Christians, and that enmity exists because we divide before the same God. We divide in expectation of human history; we divide in expectation of what the passion to create entails. But nevertheless we recognize now that we have a humane obligation to preserve that enmity in the interest of truth and life rather than, by assuming the perspective of God, to pass a distinctly premature judgment upon our dissent.

KAPLAN. Permit me now to point out the misapprehension under which you have been laboring with regard to my conception of God, namely that God is merely an idea, in contrast with your assumption—as you put it—that God has a persona which is objective to us as well as to himself. The fact is that there is a third alternative to “idea” and “persona”; namely, that God is, objectively speaking, “process.” The process is that

If Not Now, When?

which in human nature is experienced as transcendence. Transcendence is the part of nature known as organicity. Organicity is the fact that any entity is more than the sum of its parts with each part sharing in that incremental plus. The traditional term for transcendence is "holiness." Thus we read in Leviticus 19: "YHWH spoke to Moses. He said: Speak to the whole community of the Jews of Israel and say to them, 'Be Holy, for your God, YHWH, is Holy.'"

The process of organicity, functioning *self-consciously* in human organic societies, is God, as the power that makes for salvation. That power is none other than holiness, or transcendence, which is not merely an idea. It is a process. Gravitation, to draw an analogy from nature, is a process that makes for power, whereas holiness is a process that makes for spirit. "Not by mere power shall man prevail" (1 Sam. 2:9). Something more is needed, namely, spirit, or holiness. God as process belongs neither to supernaturalism nor to naturalism, but to transnaturalism.

Just what all this means in terms of human experience calls for a more authentic account of human experience than that given thus far in the standard works on psychology. The familiar account speaks of the basic human experience as consisting of feeling, thought, and will, with the qualification that every experience has something of all three elements. A far more illuminating categorizing of human experience would be: needs, facts, deeds. Thus wisdom deals with needs, reason with facts, and intelligence with deeds. Wisdom deals with religion. Reason with nature. Intelligence with technics.

The problems of wisdom, or religion, are thus the problems concerning human needs. Human needs may be classified into physical, psychosocial, and spiritual. For the creative survival of the human species, it is essential for individuals and groups to control the effort to satisfy the physical needs so as not to yield to lust and the psychosocial needs so as not to yield to greed. It has been well said with regard to the problem of war

that it might be averted if we were to bear in mind that there is enough in the world to meet men's needs but not their lusts and greeds.

Nothing of what I have said about actual human experience is in the familiar mode of supernaturalism or of naturalism. The proper designation for my view of human experience is *transnaturalism*. That is where humanism belongs.

Both of us are equally eager to bring about the revival of Jewish life. Whatever ideas we may have about theology, there can be no improvement in the present condition of Judaism unless action be taken to foster a sense of solidarity among all Jews who for whatever reason wish their children to accept the Jewish spiritual heritage. Such action presupposes a common universe of discourse with regard to religion and its role as a means of enabling the Jewish people to maintain its continuity despite change and its unity despite diversity of environment and world outlook. The transnatural view of Judaism, it seems to me, may well serve as a common denominator for that purpose, mediating as I conceive it to be, between supernaturalism and naturalism. Transnaturalism views the problem of group survival from the standpoint of needs rather than facts. People of different views and doctrines of the universe nonetheless have common needs.

To satisfy one's spiritual needs one must reckon with the facts of history and with the factuality of the present. It is an historical fact that the intellectual and spiritual leaders of the past were ill-informed about the facts of nature in general and human life in particular. Even so great a thinker as Aristotle assumed that heavenly bodies were ensouled. It is a fact that much of what is contained in Jewish tradition as traditional fact is mythology. For such tradition to be taken seriously we have to demythologize it. Thus, when we read in the Book of Deuteronomy (4:7) that Moses addressed the Israelites in the wilderness in the words "What great nation has its gods so near as YHWH is to us?," we cannot but regard that statement as

If Not Now, When?

mythology. However, by demythologizing that statement we arrive at the objective fact that the founders of ancient Israel actually experienced the reality of God in a way that was different from the way of the nations. It is that fact which makes all the difference in the world when we wish to arrive at the ultimate meaning of human life. That is where we have to make up our minds whether to think as supernaturalists, naturalists, or transnaturalists. If our purpose is to cooperate on behalf of a creative future for the Jewish people, we are most likely to achieve that purpose by agreeing to approach our problem as transnaturalists. I shall presently explain what I mean by transnaturalism.

So much for the way in which to deal with the facts recorded in our tradition. But now, we must reckon with the facts of present-day Jewish life. It is a fact that the Jewish people is no longer a people *de jure*. To be that it would have to be self-governing, self-educative, and self-perpetuating. It *was* that throughout its past until, roughly speaking, the last quarter of the eighteenth century. Then began the political process of its desegregation, usually designated "emancipation." This process brought the desegregated Jews into direct contact with the so-called enlightenment of the Western nations, as a result of which the collective consciousness, which had maintained its solidarity as a living, functioning people, began to disintegrate. Then followed the Napoleonic "Synhedrion" of 1805-1807 and deliberately changed the entire status of Jews from that of nation to that of denomination. That was followed by the Jews themselves, without any external pressure, confirming twice their denominational status affirmed by the Napoleonic Synhedrion, once at Brunswick, Germany, in 1844 and a second time in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, in 1885.

Though the Reform denomination recanted in the platform adopted in Columbus, Ohio, in 1937, and restored the status of peoplehood, no action other than a change in attitude toward Zionism has so far been the practical outcome. No authoritative

constitution or code of laws has emanated from that new platform. The Jews are at best little more than an anonymous amalgam, the identity of which emanates to a large extent more from the anti-Semites than from the Jews themselves. That fact should be of primary concern to those of us who wish to stem accelerating assimilation and absorption of Jews into the general population. A minimum requirement to effect the saving of the Jewish people from such a fate is to summon a reconstitutional convention of all Jews to whom the disappearance of the Jewish people is nothing less than an unthinkable prospect.

COHEN. I couldn't possibly undertake a detailed response to the whole of the position you have developed. It is a closely woven fabric with holes just large enough to crawl through. What strikes me in general is that you have inverted the order of argument in such a way as to make any manner of theological or purely speculative consideration irrelevant to the pragmatic reconstitution of the Jewish people. I suspect that my difficulty with this manner of argument is that it renders the theological superstructure top-heavy, ungainly, and irrelevant, whereas I regard the theological presuppositions of Jewish existence less as superstructure than as foundation.

What makes the Jewish nation mysterious is that it was convoked out of the mists of historical time by its divinity. It did not gather over millennia, defining its racial and ethnic composition through a process of winnowing and amalgamation. It was a people gathered from the midst of people and promised a land which it had not, until its ascension to it, previously known. A most curious beginning. Assuredly then (and on this we can agree for the moment) the Jewish people is a given reality, a *fact* which, regardless of the way we construe its origins and destiny, is an historical reality.

KAPLAN. Agreed! The Jewish people is a reality. It has a history, and though sick it is still alive. If it weren't, there would

If Not Now, When?

be no desire to reconstitute it. If the Jewish people were a mere ghost or memory, that would be the end of the matter. But the point is that we must realize fully to what extent you and I experience the need to bring the Jewish people back to life. We Jews, as a people, are in a schizoid situation. It is the reverse of "Old Man River." In Israel, the Jews are "tired of dyin'" as a people. They want to be renewed as a people. Outside of Israel they are *afear'd o' livin'*. Here in America Jews are afraid of displaying their group reality or of manifesting their group consciousness. What might help Jews to lose their fear of living as Jews might be the fact that blacks are insisting upon fostering educational and communal group consciousness of their own. At one time I thought I could persuade black leaders to share with us Jews our group consciousness. I thought that their emergence from a state of bondage into freedom is what they have in common with us, and that this common historical experience might win them over. However I soon learned that I was mistaken. Why should they fall heir to a social heritage which is subject to the ferocity of anti-Semitism?

The main point I am trying to make is that if Jewish life is to be restored to health, or normalized, each individual Jew must find it necessary and desirable to display his belonging to the Jewish people in a way that is audible, visible, and tangible. For a Jew to feel this, the Jewish people to which he belongs must be self-governing, self-educative, and self-perpetuating. That assumption is fully implied in the well-known maxim of Hillel: "If I am not for myself, who will be for me, but if I am only for myself, what am I and if not now, when?" Could any statement be more in keeping with the facts of social psychology? Was Hillel, then, a naturalist? There is only one category to which that statement belongs, namely transnaturalism.

COHEN. This is a very important point. I don't want to lose sight of this when I reply to you because I think you're making some enormously suggestive remarks which reveal that your posi-

tion is not as rigidly naturalist as you imagine my position to be rigidly supernaturalist. What I'd really like to do when you're finished is to redefine some terms so that when we converse the next time we can maybe begin to introduce a somewhat different vocabulary.

KAPLAN. You probably mean a "modern" vocabulary. I wholeheartedly agree with you. In this respect, I might suggest that we learn to operate with a modern equivalent of the traditional concept of a covenant whereby God is said to have bound himself to the people of Israel, to rescue them out of the slough of sin and despond. In terms of human experience of a transnatural character, such a covenant implies a sense of commitment to a destiny which, in the transnature of things, is bound to be ultimately fulfilled, no matter what happens to the Jewish people.

Incidentally, it is at this juncture that we can begin to come to an understanding of what we mean by the term "transnatural," particularly as it applies to God. In the history of philosophy there were two major thinkers to whom the terms "God" and "nature" were synonymous, namely, Socrates and Spinoza. Spinoza in fact proclaimed that God was *Deus sive natura*. Socrates implied it no less when he observed that "the unreflective life is not worth living." His assumption was that one arrives at the idea of God through reflection. In Judaism, however, the idea of God is arrived at not through reflection but through righteousness articulated as law. Righteousness is neither a manifestation of supernaturalism nor of naturalism but of transnaturalism.

In this connection I think it important to point out that the term "God" is in the Hebrew Bible not intended to be understood as a substantive noun like "man" but rather as a functional noun like "being." Therefore we read "YHWH am your God who brought you out of the land of Egypt to be your God." The divine function was that of lawgiver and the laws

If Not Now, When?

bestowed had the purpose of enabling men to fulfill their humane potential. The supernatural is not implied and the natural is extended transitively.

The functional aspect of the term God is not that of an answer to a question of information respecting the origin of events, but an answer to what man needs to be, to have, and to do in order to achieve his destiny as a human being or, collectively, as a family, tribe, or nation. That implies a type of functioning that is transnatural. As we proceed with the discussion we shall be able to identify that which is "trans" in the order of nature.

COHEN. Why not try to identify now what constitutes the "trans" in *transnature*?

KAPLAN. That calls for an analysis of human needs, from the standpoint of the way different civilizations have been reckoning with them. The Far Eastern civilizations, for example, especially the Buddhist, assume that human needs should be suppressed, since they are the source of all that is evil in human life. To be rid of that evil, the human being has to pass through a series of transmigrations, at the end of which he achieves nirvana. A somewhat similar attitude toward human needs was taken by ancient Stoicism, without giving rise to belief in the transmigration of souls. As far as Western civilization is concerned, the general attitude has been that of "the greatest happiness of the greatest number," which in practice has meant "maximum needs to be satisfied to the maximum degree," regardless of the need for self-control to guard against licentiousness, avarice, and aggression. Hebraism, on the other hand, represented moderation in the satisfaction of one's needs through self-discipline before the temptation to yield to those evils.

The pragmatic difference in attitude toward human needs between Hebraism and Stoicism is illustrated by the following two facts. In the first place, a Stoic who had fallen victim to

physical suffering would consider it entirely proper to commit suicide. A Jew who found himself in a similar position would regard suicide a mortal sin. Secondly, when the Roman empire found itself in need of a unifying religion, instead of adopting Stoicism, which possessed great social prestige, it adopted the religion which issued from the dissidents of the Jewish people. The Jews thus proved to be in possession of the better method than did the Stoics of dealing with the problem of human needs, from the standpoint of human survival.

COHEN. It strikes me that your description of human needs has at least an implicit analogy to Freud's description of the tripartite division of the human psyche.

KAPLAN. Well, but with him it is mainly a problem of unconscious life.

COHEN. No, oh no.

KAPLAN. Do you mean the ego, the superego, and the id?

COHEN. What I meant to suggest was that your description of the degenerative needs of lust and greed Freud would ascribe to the impulsive, ingesting id. Aggression is the social aggrandizement of the ego, and what you describe as the collective conscience is a portion of the superego, the moral tyranny that organizes the light and the dark sides of human personality.

KAPLAN. But you see that is a pejorative understanding. Ego doesn't suggest that to me.

COHEN. Well, I don't think Freud means it pejoratively either. Absolutely not. The tripartite elucidation of the consciousness is descriptive, not pejorative. In fact, part of the function of psychoanalytic theory is to achieve a reconciliation

If Not Now, When?

in which there is reintroduced into human personality an equity and living balance in the tension of human needs.

What I really do want to press with you is this. I don't regard myself as a supernaturalist in any sense which could be considered theurgic or magical. I have never been able to undertake intercessionary prayer. I have never asked God for anything, except for one thing. The only thing I have ever asked God for is that he should be existent when I call. Now what I mean (and in this I am making both a personal as well as a theological statement) is that for a man to speak out of himself to the world (whether he speaks out of himself to the world as a society about him or a civilization that encompasses many societies or a universe that encompasses a plurality of civilizations), the wish to speak out to that civilization presupposes not only that the civilization exists to which he addresses himself but that the civilization has the capacity to respond. We know perfectly well from history that many societies have tried to speak out to civilizations but have spoken from such inadequate grounds that they've been swallowed and destroyed. Clearly the Alexandrian empire had to collapse. In fact, one of the most interesting things is the revisionist history that has been written during recent years regarding Alexander the Great. Until our time Alexander was regarded as the first Hellene to recognize that the *barbaroi* were people. It is only now, most recently in literature reconstructing the history of Alexander the Great, that one begins to see that it was not that he believed that they were like himself—but quite the opposite. He believed that they were so contemptible that they could be destroyed, enslaved, subjugated, as well as bribed and cozened as tributary cultures. In other words Alexander extended the range of the Greek empire beyond the wildest imagination of his Attic opponents or his Macedonian forebears. But finally he was interested in imposing the image of Alexander on all the world—not, therefore, his universalism, which the nineteenth century praised so abundantly in the great days of the British empire

and the French empire, when the whole notion of extending the authority of England or the authority of France to the underdeveloped nations of the nineteenth century was regarded as analogous to the imperial ambition of Alexander to spread the culture of Greece throughout the world. We know today what Alexander was concerned with was imposing himself as a divinity upon all the inhabited universe.

The effort of Alexander, a typically narcissistic enterprise, was bound to fail since it was founded upon the extension to numberless others of a particularized delusion. The calling out to others which is involved in the diffusion of personal wisdom and creativity is ultimately transactional. It is effective and endures (however its modifications and adjustments) if the proposing self is not corroded by the expectations of domination and if the receiving self and society is uncongealed and dynamic. This was not the case with Alexander and the cultures of Asia Minor. It was a case of cultivated contempt confronting a rigid and hieratic society in a state of decadence. What could be less enduring?

So much for historical transaction, but the transaction of the self to God, my own calling out to the *He who is*, is based upon a no less transactional intuition. I do not pray in order to ask and petition. The address to God is an address to the respondent Other, the Other who exists, incomparable to me, but nonetheless "my God." I cannot impose myself upon him; I cannot demand from him nor can he be seduced into hearing me. My only belief, the belief underlying all celebratory prayer, is that He is. The difference between the calling out to history, to civilizations, to cultures, to other persons, differs from the calling out to God in that the relation which exists in the former is that between essential equals. Alexander's *hubris* was that he imagined himself to be ontologically superior to the barbarians, superior in being. He had to fail. The calling out of the individual to God is based upon an ontological disparity of infinite magnitude—God and man are absolutely other to each—but of

If Not Now, When?

an existential identity, in that God is as near to me as my own breath.

KAPLAN. What do you mean by "call out" to a civilization?

COHEN. What I mean is that when a human being addresses history he does not regard history as inert or dead. He regards it as having a vitality capable of both challenging him and receiving him, whether he is functioning as artist or writer or as a Herzl, a Disraeli, or a Ben Gurion. The effort of your own life, Dr. Kaplan, would have been vain and self-delusive had you not been persuaded from the very beginning that the people lived, that there was a Jewish people existent which could respond to your call.

KAPLAN. At this point, however, I think it would be in order to contrast the way the Jewish people is expected to respond and the way the Greeks were expected to respond to Alexander. Whereas Alexander, as you rightly point out, was interested in imposing his image on the rest of the world, the Hebraic conception of the function of the Jewish people is that it be an example to the rest of the world of "righteousness translated into law." Each of the three patriarchs was promised by God that their descendants would be a source of blessedness to the other nations. Note what you have said about the tendency of powerful nations, whether ancient or modern. They have always been motivated by imperialistic ambition to exploit and subdue weaker civilizations. No such thought is implied in the Hebraic conception. The main concern of the Torah or of the prophets is that the nations act ethically toward their own citizenry and in their relations to each other.

COHEN. Leave to one side for the moment the question of whether my conception of God is really supernatural (I don't think it is because my feeling about God and my passion toward

him is founded upon the notion of an involved God—not God as pure being abstracted from the course and conduct of human history). My instincts are classically Hebraic and Jewish in that mine is the passion to have God as involved as I am. You, it seems to me, retain a kind of skepsis as to whether the burden between God and man is really equal. I've always detected in your theology the conviction that the Jewish people had to carry God in its hands, because if the Jewish people didn't continuously exhibit him before man, God wouldn't really be able to exhibit himself.

KAPLAN. I translate it simply in terms of conscience. The Jewish people was informed by Isaiah that nothing superhuman was expected of it, nothing more than essential decency. On the other hand, being aware to what extent it had fallen short of what was expected of it, Israel turned out to be the first and so far the only nation in the world burdened by a sense of communal sin.

COHEN. I think this brings us closer to something very crucial. It helps me also as a point of departure to elaborate something of my own theological view.

Essentially I regard any man born into the universe as a creature come naked before nature. Naked. The obligation to give clothing to that nakedness is the obligation of environment. And indeed the parental obligation to give clothing to that nakedness is to give it also the intensities and directions out of which values are born. The fact that the child comes free and defenseless into the universe immediately introduces what I would call a transactional relation between man and the environment. And that transactional relation is both collective and individual in the sense that the parent operates not only as a member of the total value-laden *socius* but also as parent responding to a particular child. And the child responds to the directives and the directional indications of the parent. Even at

the most instinctual level of human life there is a transactional balance struck between the child and the environment. Among the values which are absolutely critical in the formation of such transactional relations are values that give the child an awareness that the universe can never be swallowed by the child, that the universe is much too large to be digested. And part of the initial wisdom of being a parent is the wisdom of beginning to instruct the child in the limits of its own body, in the limits of its own needs, in the limits of its own desires, in order that the child should begin to learn what is possible and what is not possible to the single self. I don't believe in the argumentation of the seventeenth century that the idea of God is natural to human reason. I don't think the idea of God is a natural idea. I don't think it's an inborn idea. I don't think it's an idea given with the baby's milk. What is given in the most primal condition of human life is an awareness of dependency and independency, of creativity and loss, of the passion to belong and the need to be separate, of the call for autonomy and the need for trust. As we grow we acquire a sense of the bipolarity of existence. I must be for myself, but if I am only for myself then I have lost a part of myself. My self implies the other and the other is both my friend as well as a stranger to my interests.

In the opening methodological chapter of his *Physics*, Aristotle distinguishes between those things which are prior in the order of knowledge but not prior in the order of nature and those other things which are prior in the order of nature which are not prior in the order of knowledge. I have taken this to mean that what we see in nature may take us years to understand because even though it is immediate, tactile, available, direct, we do not have the intellectual sophistication to understand it. Whereas we do acquire very early from our environment principles of discrimination which later will allow us to understand those self-evident facts that had confronted us from the first day that we came to life.

Do you see in this line of reasoning what I'm trying to say?

The existence of God is both the counter to my own by which I learn more of the value of my existence and to which I contrast the perfection and imperfection of my nature. I am not arguing as Kant argued that the only reason for the existence of God, after the ontological argument collapsed, was to guarantee the moral law. Such a position (which Moses Mendelssohn inherited) doesn't appeal to me, because finally it makes the existence of God a function of my need for clarification and in the process denies real existence to him. If we begin with the empirical awareness of transactional reality as it occurs at the earliest stages of human life, we can understand more readily how it is that the mature relation between man and God is transactional, both natural and transcendent. It is the transaction between that which must be made clear and that which preserves mystery to the end. For me God is that person who continues to keep his secrets. He is for me the mystery that I can never exhaust.

KAPLAN. But excuse me, why do you call it God?

COHEN. I call it God because the most imperative mystery is the mystery of the personality. If indeed lust, aggression, and conscience are the tripartite complexity of the human species, the tripartite complexity of the human self, and the fact that after millennia of human life we are still ravaged by the ineluctable in the human self—the fact that we do aggress, the fact that we do aggrandize, the fact that we do deceive—for me the transaction that goes on between myself and God, whom I regard as The Mystery, as the primal mystery, is what I regard as also the other side to the self, the other side to my person.

September 17, 1971

KAPLAN. It strikes me that your closing remarks when last we talked revealed an inconsistency in your approach. On the one hand you seem to imply that to expect in the contemporary world for the Jewish people to be resurrected in order that Judaism might live is almost out of the question. All that can survive of historic Judaism is a kind of purposive association of individuals, each of whom would contribute what he would regard as distinctively Jewish. In other words, purposive associations of Jewish individuals may survive in the Diaspora, but the Jewish people as an organic society cannot survive. On the other hand, later in the course of our dialogue you did imply the possibility of Jewish collective survival throughout the world. You even spelled out the condition as not necessarily having to be religious pluralism but what you termed "religious consensualism." I would prefer that you take the second position and follow it through to its consequences, rather than reckon with the first. Because of an actual, scientific, historical law of human nature, which I had occasion to refer to in our previous discussion and which is so clearly formulated by Hillel in the dictum already cited by me, "If I am only for myself what am I?" In other words, without a living, functioning people that is self-

governing and self-perpetuating, with a sense of destiny which is transmitted from generation to generation, Judaism cannot survive. I therefore think that the logical procedure for us now would be actually to try to spell out the concrete procedure which has to be followed in order to effect the reconstitution of the Jewish people in a spirit which would impel it to act in accordance with the threefold purpose we've agreed on, namely universal peace, ethical nationhood, and individual happiness. Paradoxical as it may seem, unless the threat of war is removed once and for all, it is impossible to get any nation to act ethically. By the same token it is impossible to achieve the greatest happiness of the greatest number when the nation to which one belongs is morally and politically corrupt.

COHEN. I don't regard my position as a contradiction since quite obviously my bleak description of ultimate Jewish acculturation and disappearance I think unlikely. But I do reckon with it as an historic possibility with an urgency which at no previous moment in Jewish history would have been quite as conceivable, since Jewish civilization at other moments in our long history functioned far more efficiently to achieve and maintain social and historical consensus. This is not to say that there were not periods in Jewish history when the Jewish population was exceedingly small and those who despised us were rather more concentrated in their animus. At those junctures we could have been crushed by the weight of history, notwithstanding the indomitability of our spirit. We have survived many accidents.

The question which confronts us now is that it takes imagination to survive necessity. What I mean is that there is today the real option—option in the historic, not in a moral, sense. The option in the historic sense is for the individual Jew to commit suicide as a Jew but survive as a living human being, deracinated, cut off, realigned with other values, reassimilated to different nationhoods and, in fact, passed through into the great void which is unfortunately my appraisal of what passes as

the idealism and value structure of contemporary Western history. Caught then in the predicament of holding on and rebuilding (or in your term resurrecting the Jewish people) is that once again the Jewish people must pit itself against the entropy of general history.

There seems to be, as we are both well aware, a current of suicidalism in Western culture which has run unchecked for centuries and which certainly in our times has reached an orgy of culmination. One needn't document the impasse to which we have come, that the most sophisticated, advanced, technologically superior civilization in the history of the human race is virtually in a position where it is capable of extinguishing itself. This would indicate if not the presence of some archetypal death wish at least archetypal stupidity. The Jewish people, as I have understood its history, has stood for an archetypal resistance to the death wish as well as to stupidity. I would absolutely agree with you, therefore, that the passion to endure is not only a correct passion but one demanded by the whole direction of human history. It is not simply that the Jew says, "I do not wish to die"; it is that the Jew says, "there is still work to be done."

We can begin then with a programmatic agreement that there is a task ahead, and that there is a task ahead which is not alone predicated on a survivalist ideology (which is what I accused you of twenty years ago) but on something rather more profound. The people has not only the right to survive but has the obligation to survive by virtue of its self-defining identity, which is that it is a people that gives service and that it is a people that has always defined its role in human history as service. Initially, if I can extend your interpretation of the covenant, the covenant was not (as it is in bondage theologies) an act of mutual enslavement in which God binds himself irrespective to the people and the people obligates itself irrespective to its God, but it is a free act of mutual service very closely connected to my notion of consensual theology which is the foundation of humanism, whether its doctrine be founded upon

what you describe as "supernaturalist," which I describe as "existential," which you describe as "naturalist," which I criticize as "pragmatic." It doesn't matter. The task which is set before man is the same task: that the human race survive, not alone Jews, but the human race survive and that the Jews have an obligation to that race since for two millennia it instructed that race. Whether it chose to listen to it or not was *its* problem, but ours is the enduring obligation to teach.

KAPLAN. The point we arrived at in our discussion I take to be this: The difference between a supernaturalist and a naturalist approach to God and Jewish religion is by no means unbridgeable. My contention now is that from a purely objective perspective, the humanist basis for Jewish religion is more likely to enable us to arrive at an authentic conception of Jewish religion as such and of the God idea in particular. By authentic, I mean that the very nature of religion and God can be demonstrated as having greater validity in terms of human experience, instead of in terms of faith, which is experience by proxy. Indeed, the assumption throughout the Hebrew Bible is that the belief in God is a matter of wisdom, not a matter of faith. The Hebrew word *emunah*, which occurs in Habakkuk 2, has, in all translations beginning with the Septuagint until recently, been rendered as "faith" instead of "faithfulness."

COHEN. There is implicit in your formulation a partial view of the nature of faith. I do not deny the power of your counter "experience by proxy," which I take to mean your conviction that a religion founded upon faith is one in which not direct experience, but the mediate postulations of a tradition, carrying with them the authority of the indoctrinated, is substituted for living experience. There is no doubt that this is historically true and that your criticism of such "faith doctrines" is justified. But faith has been for me not only (and not even principally) a concession of belief to an established and transmitted body of

authoritative teaching and practice; it has been the placing of myself before the possibility of a divinity, the raising of the deepest questions within myself, and the offering of myself—beyond the bounds of conventional logic and the laws of reasonable evidence—to Him whom I believe to be, to have life, and possess the gift of life. In other words my conception of faith begins in the deepest resources of personal life and only at the point at which that faith aspires to fellowship, community, and historic confirmation does it become Jewish faith. Another way of putting this is that I do not think Jews of my generation—raised up outside the Jewish tradition but nonetheless aware of their blood connection to the Jewish people—become Jews except as an act of choice. The faith is my faith and it is a faith which flowers within an historical environment which is that of the Jewish people. The means, however, by which the faith which asks and answers ultimate questions and the binding of one's self to the Jewish people and its history—that transaction is very curious and mysterious.

KAPLAN. The Israelite experience of God as faithfulness is one which transpires within the context of having actually seen with their own eyes what it is God has done for them. It is not faith as proxy experience, faith on the testimony of authority, but directly experienced.

The validity and efficaciousness of the religio-humanist approach to questions of faith is confirmed for me by the fact that fundamentally the only logical basis for ethical conduct is religion and its idea of God. If I am not mistaken, I recall the substance of Henry Sidgwick's *Methods of Ethics* as consisting in the argument that neither hedonism nor utilitarianism is adequate as a means of validating ethical behavior. Even Kant before him found it necessary to resort to what is virtually a pragmatism, namely, practical reason, to arrive at a basis for ethics. The first thinker, however, who discerned the *historical* source of ethical behavior was Emile Durkheim. In his *The*

Elementary Forms of the Religious Life, Durkheim's investigation of religious sociology led him to the conclusion that "the real function of religions is not to make us think, to enrich our knowledge, nor to add to the conceptions which we owe to science others of another origin and another character, but rather it is to make us act, to aid us to live" (p. 416).

Durkheim's main point is that religion is the source of whatever the human mind has been able to achieve rationally, technically, and ethically. He arrived at that conclusion by proving that *religion is fundamentally the functioning of the collective consciousness, and that the development of the individual mind has its roots in the functioning of the collective consciousness. The collective consciousness as such is the result of some rallying totem, any object on the earth beneath or in the heavens above which renders human beings aware of their being in need of one another.* In the course of that collective procedure which we identify as religion, there emerge certain ideas, principles, concerning reality—their own reality, the realities of human nature, and the realities of their environment. Through perception of the realities of the environment they come to have their world outlook, and through perception of their own nature they arrive at certain laws of behavior. Those laws of behavior, when effectively internalized by each individual, come to be their morals and ethics.

Since Durkheim is principally interested in the nuclear forms of religious life, he has little to say about any advanced religion. Those of us who are interested in the Jewish religion would do well, therefore, to apply to it the objective fact concerning the role of the Jewish collective mind. We should try to understand what it is that has singled it out for incomparable impact upon the rest of mankind. I think that it is probably the consequence of the unique character of that which, in the case of the ancient Hebrews, served as a rallying emblem to activate their collective consciousness. It was the name YHWH which the Torah interprets as meaning "I will ever be the same" (cf. Exodus 3:14),

If Not Now, When?

which meaning is stressed repeatedly in the Scripture "I YHWH do not change" (Mal. 3:6). The fact, together with the repeated enactment of a covenant between the people of Israel and YHWH as well as the ritual of circumcision, imparted to the collective consciousness of the Jewish people a deliberate striving toward self-perpetuation.

What method would it be natural for a people, endowed with such a collective consciousness, to employ as a means of perpetuating itself other than that of fostering a strong sense of having to obey the laws and statutes ascribed to YHWH?

The problem, then, from my point of view, is which of the two approaches—naturalism or supernaturalism—is most likely to suggest to us the next step that has to be carried out in Jewish life to regenerate the Jewish people.

The sum and substance then of what I have been saying is the following: A religion is the collective consciousness of an organic society like a nation or people. As such, religion to the individual member of a people consists in his sharing that collective consciousness. For an individual to share that collective consciousness, he has to experience the reality of the people whose collective consciousness he shares. Secondly, he has to experience the authenticity of the content of that collective consciousness. What likelihood, then, is there that a Jew who cannot subscribe to supernaturalism, would want to share the traditional version of the contents of the Jewish consciousness? Moreover, assuming that the Jew in question manages to reinterpret those contents in naturalist terms but finds that the Jewish people is on the verge of vanishing, would he be likely to want to share its collective consciousness? On the other hand, is it not likely that if his Jewish upbringing and education have been so intensive as to cause him to yearn for the possibility of sharing the Jewish collective consciousness, that he would want most eagerly to have the Jewish people reinstated in its original condition of unity and solidarity?

Moreover would it be equally natural for him to study

the Jewish tradition itself to find in it some facts and ideas which might validate his naturalist attitude toward existence and reality as such? It so happens that as far as the biblical tradition is concerned, and to some extent also the rabbinic tradition, there are a number of adumbrations or foreshadowings of religious humanism which make it possible for a naturalist Jew to share that tradition as a necessary stage in Judaism conceived as an evolving civilization.

As illustration of the foregoing I have had occasion in the course of our conversation to refer to the following: 1) the term "God" is not a substantive noun and therefore does not necessarily refer to a being but to a function, the function which manifests itself in the fulfillment of man's spiritual potential; 2) the religious attitude expected of the individual members of the people of Israel is not faith, as experience by proxy, but wisdom, which consists in a normative sense of values; 3) the fact that the source of religious experience is anything but beyond the reach of average human need. The Bible stresses again and again the fact that the reality of God can be experienced as near at hand. To be sure, faith not based on experience did begin to play a role in Jewish life since the Second Commonwealth; however, if that stands in the way of our interest in the resurrection of the Jewish people, there is no reason why we should not fall back upon the more viable religious attitude of wisdom and the nearness of God as affirmed in the Bible.

COHEN. My intention in the remarks which follow is not to respond to the reflection of your position as doctrine but as felt thought which is, of course, the continuing act of a man who thinks rather than of a man who wishes that others think like himself.

The real problem in contemporary Jewish life is that, as never before in Jewish history, it is possible that the individual Jew shall live and the people shall die. The interpretation of Jewish history which survived unbroken and with renewed

If Not Now, When?

support throughout the era of Nazi persecution was that the Jewish people endured by virtue of the indomitability of its vision and the insistence that it was able continuously to build within itself bulwarks against the kingdom of death. And thus far in Jewish history, despite endless depredation, we succeeded. We have succeeded so miraculously from one point of view that we can regard with equanimity the prospect that at least in this society and culture in the Anglo-Saxon West the norms of suspicion and mistrust which in the past led to the perpetuation of Jewish insecurity will have abated sufficiently that indeed in our time American Jews, English Jews, and Jews of many other countries of Western Europe will have the option to determine from the grounds of individual conscience rather than collective conscience whether the game continues to be worth the candle. Whether Jewish civilization is able to continue to provide adequate sources of vitality, imagination and, in Max Scheler's usage, roles and models to individual conscience that will justify the undoubted labor of being Jewish.

I would never describe being Jewish as a burden, but I would surely describe it as a labor. In consequence then of this line of response it would seem to me that it is incumbent upon Jewish thinking to make evident and palpable (as it is thus far not evident and palpable) that the historic Jewish consciousness and the obligation of the people to live is not based solely or sufficiently on the natural urgency that creatures endure, but upon the sense that a civilization which is rather more than the simple aggregate of individual instinctive needs to survive, has an unfulfilled obligation to the human race. And not alone to the human race but to its own collective sensibility which has not yet been fully realized in history. Certainly the dilemma of Jewish religion (the dilemma which, I might add, virtually debars me personally from participating actively in public Jewish life but has never turned me aside from the central focus of my life as a Jew) is the feeling that in fact what transpires in the public domain of Jewish life is increasingly hardened, obdurate,

closed, misaligned, to principalities and dominions, interests and powers, rather than to "needs, facts, deeds" as you spoke of them previously. I am, no less than yourself, distressed by the continuing refusal of Orthodox Judaism not only to examine itself but virtually to think at all, and it seems to me that we are in a period when literalism is already able to be described as an historic, classic doctrine when it is in fact no more than a century and a half old.

Judaism is a prisoner of social history, and to the extent that the social history of our times is a social history of decomposition, the obduracy with which Jewish civilization responds to the crises—the moral, psychological, social, intellectual, and historical crises of twentieth-century man—indicates that we are at a critical impasse.

What to do?

It would seem to me that the first item of agenda is the recognition, in your own language, that the principal obligation of any civilization is to endure—to continue to exercise its self-governing, self-educating, and self-proclaiming concern for the human race. This is the obligation of any ethical civilization. If Jewish civilization were a triumphalist civilization, we would today be either an imperial power or a power buried under the dust of history. It is precisely because Judaism has never been an imperial civilization that it has endured, and it is precisely because today it is given the option to join imperial civilizations that we face the threat of disappearing as a civilization while surviving as individuals. I have never been aware of any point in Jewish history as beset by self-righteousness as the present. Self-righteousness of all orders and varieties. Self-righteousness in the overcommitment of American Jewish psychology, indeed the psychology of Western Jewry, to the triumphalist reinforcement of the success of the State of Israel. So that, in effect, one can speak of Israel as the guarantor of an unexamined conscience, unexamined to itself and unexamined certainly to those who imagine that their ethical conduct is guaranteed by the conduct

If Not Now, When?

of any state or any nation that is not defined pre-eminently by ethical values.

The Jew is today suffering no less than all the West from the continuing tradition of Augustinian doctrine and Manichean heresy. Too much do we believe in the kingdom of light and the kingdom of darkness, and too much do we imagine that these kingdoms do not interpenetrate and that by allowing light into the darkness the darkness is not illuminated and by allowing darkness into the light the light is not textured. Man is neither good nor evil. He is quite clearly, as the Bible indicates, the extraordinary mix.

Against the background of such a view of human nature and the human situation, the task of a civilization that would not merely survive but a civilization that would grow is that it reconceive its foundation from the perspective of consensus rather than, I would suggest, from your doctrine of pluralism. Pluralism, I believe, is a temptation to a *détente*, to a disengagement, to a concept of *laissez aller*, of permitting doctrines to thrive in isolation rather than in competition—and, therefore, of permitting doctrines to retain the presumption of absoluteness, not because of their having passed the scrutiny of opposition, but because they are all so disinterestedly protected by secular law that they are never obliged to resist real challenge nor to expose their bite.

September 24, 1971

COHEN. You have spoken, Dr. Kaplan, of the resurrection of the Jewish people, its revivification, its recovery of the purpose and values for which it was originally convoked. You have spoken, moreover, of the symbolic function of belief as the articulation of the people's commitment to self-knowledge and self-fulfillment. You have interpreted clearly and uncompromisingly throughout your life the role of religious sancta as the instrumentality of binding the people to its task. The people is its conscience and its identity, its sense of purpose and ultimate meaning and its concrete life in the world, the acts and passions by which it spells out to the historic future the validity of its endurance, more than this the justification which permits it the incomparable pride of standing up to history, of refusing to go under as other no less noble cultures have succumbed. The Jewish people is then a people who, in your view, knows how to stand up to history and to endure. Of that fact there can be no doubt. The will to life is essential in the Jewish will. The people survives, though individuals may die into the earth, and the people is replenished as others undreamt are born. But the task is not fulfilled if it be only the case that individuals give to themselves the name "Jew" and as "Jews" join reluctantly and

abashed the collectivity which is the people. What is at issue is the nexus of joining the modes and procedures by which the individual comes to the people and by which the people embrace the individual.

Values, you have contended, are always the values of the collectivity, for no man in his singleness and isolation can do more than the effort of right. It is rather to the people, you suggest, who bear the ethical impulse to the future that the ethical act can be done. Only the people can do right and it is for this reason, if I understand you, that the individual in his autonomy, his fragmentation and transitoriness, at best struggles with the conscience of the collectivity but cannot of himself fulfill its intention. The individual is made whole by the collectivity. I know you will deny this, but it would be well at this juncture of your life to confess that you have perhaps an almost mystic love of the people. The people is your dream, it would appear, and the dream of the people, its God, its theophany, its liturgy, its practice and its history, are but the genius creations of the people bent upon a vision employing all the resource and gift of the imagination to project upon the universe, to build into its immutable structure the eternity of its vision. I for one do not care in the undogmatic forties of my life whether the people is God or God is the people. What counts at this juncture in the human enterprise is that culture and the civilities of culture survive, that peace grow in the world, that ease and tranquillity settle down upon men, that the decadence and mistrust of our times give way to a richer, more productive future. The fecklessness and confusion of those younger than myself, and I do not except myself from such confusion, is more a search for their freedom and permission to do all and everything in an egalitarian society such as ours than it is the genuine freedom of the Stoics or the Preacher who knew with an utter clarity the nature of reality, that reality was horrible but that men can build bulwarks of truth against the irresolvable conflicts of aggression and intolerance. War is not alone destructive but unreason-

able, and in its unreason and stupidity a contradiction of what is of the essence of men, that man is a creature who seeks a meaningful life. To paraphrase and extend the argument which I advanced at a colloquium in Israel,* the Jewish people is a people convoked, whether convoked by the necessity of conscience to speak out against the barbarian who threatened to overwhelm it in ancient times as in our own or whether, as I believe, it was convoked by God in acknowledgment of the congruence which existed between his own and this people's ends, the people of Israel is a people. It is a people with a natural history for which Zionism and the demythologizing of its theurgic accumulation is the historical *eschaton*, a specific fullness of time in which every human tragedy, human longing, human resolution became congruent. A natural *kairus*, to use Paul Tillich's profound conception, is, however, like an earthquake or a rainbow. It is a symbolic configuration. It reads like divinity but it is finally only nature. Zionism, for example, the ideology of resolution, the making of a Jewish state, is from the perspective of human history a single, lonely "yes" to the historical "no" of annihilation. It is an ideology useful to a time but like all ideologies (fashioned as they are through the bending of ongoing truths to the requirement of specific historic exigencies) destined to vanish as time rolls over the adaptation. Israel, then, the people of Israel, the Jewish people, is no less a dream for being an historical reality. The question is whether the people of the Jews, the people with a normalizing history in the land of Israel and the people with an abnormal history in the Diaspora and the people who have the condition of founding and extending just institutions before men, are able to interact and build. This is both a social and a theological question. I have written in the *Natural and the Supernatural Jew* that exile, *galut*, was the metahistorical coefficient of being unredeemed. This formula-

* The Ninth Annual American-Israel Dialogue held at the Weizmann Institute, Rehovoth, August, 1971, and published in the *Congress Bi-Weekly*, March 10, 1972.

tion has been infrequently understood. What I was suggesting was that Diaspora and dispersion was a historical phenomenon with grave consequences, to which the return to Zion was resolution. But that resolution in history, the resolution of Jewish political abnormality and paradox, is no resolution to the ambition of the Jewish people that it show forth to the world a better way to conduct the human enterprise.

Exile is a condition paradigmatically exemplified in the expulsion of Adam and Eve from Paradise. Every man is in some sense in exile, not alone every Jew, every man. All men are in continuous struggle with themselves and with the reality with which they contend. The image of that struggle is being cut off. Theologically, it is being cut off from God. In nature it is to be cut off from one's values and one's generative center truths. Existentially it is to be cut off from man. To these excisions and the radical loneliness which follows from such desperate "shut-upness," in Kierkegaard's acute phrase in the *Concept of Dread*, modern man has no political resolutions. Making states cannot heal, making new nations cannot mend. Transforming nations and states into collectivities of men ordered by common traditions and sancta, bound by common laws and convictions, is a process of turning the nation back into a people and commanding the people to guide the intentions of individual men in better and more fulfilling ways.

KAPLAN. I am happy to see that you share with me the pragmatic interest in the creative future of the Jewish people. But I feel that this common interest has led us to leave the original problem of the difference between the supernaturalist and the naturalist perspectives insufficiently explored. I note, for example, that even in what you have just stated, there is a tendency to evaluate the Jewish people in terms of your own supernaturalist perspective. I think, therefore, that we should resume our discussion at the point where we have left it with regard to the difference between our religious perspectives.

The season of the Jewish year during which we are conducting this dialogue is entirely appropriate to the main theorem, namely, the difference between our perspectives of religion. I refer to the fact that these days are known in the Jewish calendar as "*aseret yemay teshuvah*." The English translation of the Hebrew is "the ten days of penitence." Like all translations that one too is, as has been said of translations in general, like the wrong side of a Turkish tapestry. A correct translation of the Hebrew phrase is "the ten days of returning." The returning referred to is a returning to God. Hence a well-known rabbinic comment which states, "Seek you YHWH while he is found, call upon him while he is near." To which the rabbis add: "During the ten days of returning." The implication is that the ten days at the beginning of the Jewish year should be devoted to a search for God. In other words, penitence is to consist in a search for God. The real problem of religion, therefore, is not one of returning to a lost faith in God but of where to look for him, so that we might actually experience his reality.

That is in keeping with the biblical assumption concerning God, namely, that he is to be the object of our own personal experience and not merely the object of experience by proxy, which is faith. Moreover, time and again, the Bible stresses the fact that such experience is nearby and not at all remote, neither mystical nor ineffable. On reflection, what is so near as one's self? The advice, therefore, to seek God while he is near is advice to look into ourselves, to introspect.

When we introspect, we discover a need for self-transcendence, a need for experiencing the fact that we are but part of some inclusive and organic entity. In the words of Hillel, "But if I am only for myself, what am I?" What renders that more inclusive organic entity a source of self-transcendence, if not the fact that as an organic entity it is more than the sum of its parts? That aspect of reality is seldom fully recognized. Actually, that is why religion is identified as holiness.

Holiness is the experience of organicity and therefore a

synonym for self-transcendence. To proceed one step further, let us recall the scripture in the Book of Leviticus where YHWH is represented as having spoken to Moses that he speak to the whole community of the sons of Israel and say to them, "Be ye holy for I, your God YHWH, am holy" (Lev. 19:1). Interpreted in the terms of a modern universe of discourse, that means that Moses was to instruct the Israelites to be aware of themselves as an organic community that they should experience such sense of its wholeness or organicity as to realize that it is more than the sum of the individuals constituting it. That plus is YHWH, is divinity. As such it represents not the collective consciousness of the Jewish people but its collective conscience. Only in the light of this understanding of self-transcendence, or holiness, can we properly understand the clarion call of Judaism, "Listen, people of Israel, Eternality is our God, only Eternality."

Jewish identity demands of the individual Jew that he so come to know the Jewish people, its entire history, its civilization, and its destiny as to experience the reality of its God. This God, YHWH, is that aspect of the Jewish people which renders it more than the sum of its individuals, past, present, and future, and gives meaning to all its virtue, sins, successes, and failures. How should we designate this perspective on Judaism? I do not think that either supernaturalism or naturalism is an appropriate term. I therefore call it transnaturalism.

COHEN. I think your attempt to relocate and pinpoint the issues is very fruitful. I find the language in which you have made precise your own thinking, and in a certain sense issued a very direct challenge to my response, is really what makes this enterprise fruitful. I should clarify a historical presumption (and I confess that it probably was a *presumption* because at the time that I initiated my own public thinking with *The Natural and the Supernatural Jew* I confess to having thought it as an unexploded bombshell). I imagined that anything that

one said seriously was really heard. Quite the contrary. What is frequently the case is that the body rejects foreign material even before assimilating it and, in fact, at the time at which that book was published, now more than ten years ago, I realized that what I was most concerned with doing was re-establishing contact—principally with orthodox tradition, which has an almost constant embarrassment and evasiveness in dealing with the experience of God, the actuality of the God idea as an indispensable dimension of meaning, and which, in fact, always subsumes questions of belief to questions of behavior. This particular difficulty of classic orthodoxy is historically well justified, but no less appalling, because at this juncture in the history of Jewish civilization if there is no reopening of communication, there will be the deadening of the people. On the other hand, it is equally clear that during the past century and a half liberal theology, liberal reform, and most of the traditions of secularizing and demythologizing Judaism, have established as much an orthodoxy of dissent as the orthodoxy which they oppose. What we have presently in Jewish life are noncombatant furies, a society of Eumenides, each of whom rages to himself without addressing the common challenge before us, that the Jewish people is a people whose vocation is to transcend the mundane and to make of it an offering of life.

The foregoing is the background to my theological thinking. But you have, in the course of your remarks, chipped away at what you take to be my supernaturalist point of view, mistaking I think the heart of my position.

First, I do not conceive of the supernatural in disjunction, alienation, or distance from the natural existence of man. What exceeds and comprehends nature is not without contact with it. I have never conceived of God either as Kierkegaard has done, as "wholly other," or as medieval Jewish negative theology has done, as wholly unknowable. God is both. He is other and he is unknown, but he is not wholly other—that is, *totaliter aliter*—nor wholly unknowable. Both of these extremes place man in a

position of abject dependence, subject to the wiles and self-deceptions of divine grace. My own view is that God is both knowable and known and unknowable and inexhaustible by knowledge. This is a reasonable view if we wish to be reasonable about God. God may well have revealed through historical media, through his proclaimers and his peoples, all that it is relevant that man should know about him, but such knowledge exhausts neither his nature nor his process. The fact that man knows God through reflection upon nature, history, and human complexity does not make God equivalent to the natural. All that it means is that, according to the natural, what is known is natural—no man can pretend to know God as God knows himself. This seems to me self-evident. But no less would it be a falsification to say that because man's knowledge of God is circumscribed by his finitude, his contingent and fallible understanding, his natural condition, that therefore God is simply a function of nature and the natural. The naturalist view is a reef, the supernaturalist a shoal—to run aground on either is disastrous. The truth, as I conceive it, is mixed—our knowledge of God is natural because we are according to nature, but God is more than nature, exceeds it endlessly and is in himself beyond nature, supernatural.

The process of discovering God is really the process of turning and re-turning to the sources of existence. Let me, then, in extension of my own position and in criticism of yours, address the question from the point of view of someone like myself who felt his way gropingly into Jewish existence and through whom and to whom the reality of God, the existential combat with God, became the means of re-entrance into the collectivity of the Jewish people. I recognize that this is not the route by which most people come. Traditionally, human beings are born into a collectivity; they are born into a formed society of values, and one recognizes, in psychosocial terms, that in a certain sense the superego is laid upon the child, a gift (wanted and resisted) of millennial civilizations transmitted through the inheritance

and bequest of the family to the child; and the restorative, enduring survival value of the superego as the repository of value is in a clear sense the legacy on which the child lives in the forming years of the self.* In my own experience this overly attractive rendition of the superego cannot be regarded as descriptively accurate. The conscience of the Western Jew is no longer formed by the exclusivity of Jewish values. The distance from any project of self-transcendence implicit in the experience of growth and self-education is a reality with which we have to begin. We are dealing with a generation for whom the idea of self-transcendence—and I mean by that the idea of character—is as precarious as it has ever been in the history of the human race. Not only precarious for Jews but precarious for civilization in general. We confront a civilization in which the young are making up their character by themselves without any sense imparted to them that there is a source of character available in the general legacy of humane civilization and specifically within the legacy of their own natal loyalties and group commitments.

Consequently, the whole question of man's relation to God, of the relation of the individual Jew to the God, is one which can be addressed only after clarification of the predicament of modern man. We could say that there is ample indication in the biblical tradition that there is a transactional relation between man and God—man calls out to God, man calls out to that whole which completes him, calls out to "organicity," in your phrase, or to self-transcendence as the agency for the discovery of meaning. Supplying meaning in the most direct, immediate, experientially actual sense of belief that the source of the self is to be found in connection with the larger issues of human meaning,

* I recognize that this is a somewhat rosy picture of the superego, and for the fact of its rosiness, incomplete and somewhat inadequate. The superego, for all its being conscience, is also a medium of terrorization. The superego is in combat with the ego and not infrequently where the superego—in its parental exposition—is not joined with reinforcement of the ego, lovingkindness, compassion, understanding, the nascent ego can be crushed and deformed—A.A.C.

human destiny, and self-transcendence. In the tradition, however we understand it, that enlargement of human perspective is God.

But let us turn the question. Let us also ask, how do we avoid the predicament that what man calls out to is delusion of the self; that a self-transcendence which is grounded in no more than the reality of the self and its need for meaning is simply an artificial construct. What I am then pressing for in my notion of transactuality (which is a concept I use in an apposite sense to your notion of transnaturalism) is that we cannot as mortal creatures risk that we are really dealing with a fiction of the self and an illusion of self-transcendence. For me the credibility of the tradition, the historical tradition of the Jews and its civilization, is that it is a record of an ongoing transaction between two obduracies that never give in and never let go. The Jewish people is ratified not simply by the fact that it has the *need* for meaning but by the fact that the meaning is *there*, that the meaning is given and is experienced as given. I have no mythology of faith either in my psychology or in my religious thinking. I do experience through the witness of history and the record of previous and immemorial encounters between man and God the fact that there is a reality which I cannot under any circumstances demonstrate in an acceptable empirical manner but which, by *force majeure*, I demand of the universe. It is not an experience by proxy to affirm that I believe in the existence of a God who brought my people forth from the land of Egypt, that he did to them, not alone for the sake of their survival but for the sake of unborn myriads to come among which I am numbered. That the events of the Bible are ancient makes them no less my contemporary.

The history of the Jews is a fact which one can read cold-bloodedly as having no significance beyond itself or one can read it as the history of the unfolding presence of divinity and destiny, in which case it acquires ultimate meaning. The former reading is quite acceptable to unbelievers. It is unacceptable to the eyes

of belief. Mine are, *mutatis mutandis*, believing eyes, and my eyes see the meaning and the source which gives those events ultimate credibility. It is not faith by proxy, because I take no man's word for my faith; nor is it experience according to the flesh, because I was not literally led forth from Egypt by signs and wonders. That event was experienced by my distant ancestors, but that ancestral experience is the shaper of my own. I am free to accept it as my own and believe thereon or to deny its relevance to myself and ignore it.

God is then the answer to my calling out—and not alone to me. He it is who answers history, who sustains the civilization of the Jews, who is the reality against which I struggle and with whom I compose my life. Since I am not dogmatic about this, I would never say, as in the Pascalian wager “the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, not the God of the philosophers” or as Dostoevsky argued that if Jesus Nazareth were proved never to have lived that he would still feel himself obliged to believe in him. I can understand, nonetheless, the power of Pascal's wager and Dostoevsky's suspension of disbelief, for God is the reality which guarantees the worthwhileness, passion, and profundity of my struggle for meaning. If that guarantee has merely fictive value without possessing genuine ontological status, we run the risk—the people run the risk, human civilization runs the risk—of continuously inventing and reinventing its illusions and demanding of those illusions that they have reality simply because human beings require them. Since I am dialectically involved (let us drop for the moment questions of supernature and nature and speak simply of God and man in tension), I have no choice but to regard as real that of which I have an idea. I acknowledge, of course, the obligation to make lucid the content of my idea of God, but the fact that it is an idea does not mean that there is no corresponding actuality that factually transacts exchange with history through its medium. Consequently, I go back to the triad of concepts—creation, revelation, and redemption. I would insist upon demythologizing

If Not Now, When?

these concepts. I would insist upon removing from them any theurgic incubus. I would absolutely insist upon the function of clarification. But I would still contend that when I speak to God, I speak with an existent reality and not with a fictive projection of my need to belong to the collectivity or to the self.

KAPLAN. I find your presentation a basis for what is in common between us. We agree for instance upon the negation of a conventional understanding of supernaturalism. My disagreements arise, however, in other aspects of your discussion. You speak of struggle for meaning. You speak of God performing the process of humanizing man. What do you mean by "meaning" and what is the nature of that "process"? Can you tell me anything definite to validate either concept other than in terms of vague feelings and attitudes? Can you, for example, translate that meaning into specific ethics? Suppose that meaning would entail that you must suppress your needs because those needs stand in the way of human self-fulfillment? What then? In other words, your individualistic approach to reality might at best lead to such a conclusion. The very individualism of that approach to the problem of meaning, to the problem of the business of living, prevents one from being able to think in terms of God as the basic reality of human existence. Only in terms of social interaction and responsibility, which imply being a member of an organic group, can one deal with the specific problem of ethics, which is mainly the problem of how to cope with all of one's needs.

I might add at this point additional evidence of the indispensability of religion as the manifestation of collective consciousness and conscience as the source of ethics. The great thinkers of past centuries failed to achieve a system of ethics independent of religion. We've had hedonistic ethics, utilitarian ethics, intuitionist ethics, and in the end we were left with a harvest of verbalisms, because they attempted to base a system of ethics on a conception of the self-sufficiency of the individual.

What, other than a sense of interdependence, which functions as a source of responsibility, can be the basis of ethical behavior? Human interdependence functioning as collective consciousness implies collective conscience. In other words, on the one hand, an organic community is needed in order to have the idea of God; on the other hand, you cannot have an authentic idea of God unless you belong to an organic community.

COHEN. Of course I am aware of the seriousness of the problem you are raising. I am baffled by the fact that theologies such as mine have great difficulty in yielding a normative, binding ethic, an ethic incumbent upon the community convoked by common belief. But since I am not persuaded—given the individualistic bias of my thinking—that ethics can ever efficiently be tied to religion (and I will elaborate this later), I would like to restrict myself to a further comment on your conception of collectivity, since perhaps here some of my difficulties are defined.

The collectivity is not an abstraction. On the premise that the collectivity is no more abstract than human needs are abstract, we have to take two hard looks. You have questioned my insistence upon the autonomic character of the religious quest, and I insist upon examining the equally abstract and, to my view, contentless (because it is so rooted in formalism) structure of the community that is today the Jewish people. The real issue for you as a reconstructing thinker and myself—what would I call myself?—an impassioned thinker, a thinker with a passion which is not that dissimilar from your own, is to reckon with the state of the community. My implicit reaction to the community is that the synagogal community, the institutional community, the forms of Jewish life, the means of congregating that collectivity are so empty of vitality, of immediacy, directness, spontaneity, intuition, the capacity to center and focus human needs, human desires, the human quest for self-transcendence, that in fact I am turned away. In *The New Jews*, the

reader edited by Alan L. Mintz and James A. Sleeper, an extraordinary document precisely because it is a document made up of essays by young Jews who love the Jewish people, who have no wish to abandon their Judaism, who have no wish to sever their identity, who, in the movement, are really seeking to reconstitute the primal community, the real question is asked: How do we make new contact with an *Urgemeinschaft*, a cellular society, in which human beings meet directly not through the medium of institutional discipline and containment but meet in community because of a common search and a common sense of destiny and of historic mission?

KAPLAN. The kind of community spirit about which you speak can come into existence only through a kind of education which is motivated by the purpose of transmitting the moral, cultural, and religious knowledge of the organic community to which one belongs. Such an education must begin in the home, continue in the various schools one attends, and be sustained as self-education throughout the rest of one's life. The present sick condition of the Jewish people is the price it pays for the bankrupt condition of Jewish education on all levels. The miseducation of our spiritual leaders and the endless ignorance of our lay leaders accounts for the nonexistence of a collective Jewish consciousness that enables the average individual Jew to experience his Jewish identity with anything like the thrill of our ancestors that enabled them to repeat every morning the statement in the prayer book: "Happy are we! How goodly is our portion and how pleasant is our lot and how beautiful is our heritage."

What do you think should be done with the problem of Jewish education as a means of fostering the Jewish collective consciousness? This is an open question on our agenda.

September 25, 1971

KAPLAN. We entered upon this dialogue not merely for the purpose of arriving at a common universe of discourse but in order to achieve a common course of action. However, there is still more to say concerning the purpose of arriving at a common universe of discourse, particularly with regard to religion as such. We started our dialogue fully aware of the gap that divided our universes of discourse—yours being supernaturalist and mine being naturalist. However, as we proceeded with our dialogue we discovered that your supernaturalism was not the conventional one, and I too made it plain that neither was my naturalism conventional. The concept of transnaturalism, we agreed, might serve as a bridge that converted our original universes of discourse into one that is common to both of us.

However, there is one more point I wish to make sure of before proceeding, and that is that we both think of the term "God," as of the term "king," in a functional and not in a substantive sense, as when we speak of God as the "God of my salvation." Thus, God is manifest in whatever constitutes the salvation of man, but "saving" is not an attribute of God. Returning, however, for a moment to certain general considerations, I noted when reading some pages of your *The Myth of the*

Judeo-Christian Tradition that you take for granted that the very purpose, or the main function, of religion is to impart the truth about God, man, and the world. Such a standpoint I feel is bound to impede our progress toward the goal of our dialogue, which is, as I said at the beginning, to agree upon a course of action that would effect the spiritual and ethical resurrection of the Jewish people.

I infer from your writings that you ascribe my interest in having the Jewish people come to life again to what is not the case. Take the following statement: "If our survival is dependent upon our good sense and filial affection, we are more profoundly lost for we shall survive in sentiment, not truth." If I am right about your conception of what you think galvanizes my interest in the reconstitution of the Jewish people, then I must ask your indulgence to make my own position clear to you. That position is definitely based upon a sociological conception of human behavior that differs as much from that of classical philosophy, which rests upon the assumption of the ultimate value of reflection, as from the behavioristic assumption of B. F. Skinner that no amount of reflection can make life worth living without the right kind of conditioning environment. Underlying both, in my mind, mistaken positions is their limited understanding of human behavior as consisting of feelings which have to be brought under the control of both reason and intelligence. The mistake which is common to both of these perspectives is that they are unaware of the law of transcendence, which is that all organic entities, whether individual or collective, are more than the sum of their parts. Functions such as life, consciousness, mind, or spirit are more than the sum of the parts of the being or entity that functions and sustains them.

The following categorization of human experience might help to clarify the authentic function of religion and of the idea of God as being not that of imparting truth, or the knowledge of truth, but rather the achievement of salvation, salvation

being an answer to man's needs, needs not only of an intellectual character but of a biological, social, and spiritual character.

In this connection I would have you consider the following analysis of what I regard as experience which determines men's actions. It is only in the light of that conception of the function of religion that I am attempting to reinterpret Jewish religion in terms of human nature from an organic point of view. That is, in terms of the transnatural. It is only in the light of such an approach that we can demonstrate the extent to which the Jews have constituted an exceptional people. (By the way, it is by that designation of the Jewish people as exceptional that I would translate the traditional term "chosen.")

To categorize the different types of experience we have to bear in mind that experience consists of needs, facts, deeds. Needs made manifest through feelings, facts through percepts, deeds through actions. In consciousness, those feelings function as values; percepts function as thoughts; actions function as skills. It is only from the standpoint of human needs conceived as values that we experience a sense of *ought*. Whereas facts are experienced in terms of *is*, and deeds in terms of *how*. *Ought*, *is*, *how* are the constituents of human experience.

The general terms in literature which correspond to these three types of experience are, respectively, wisdom, reason, intelligence. It is as wisdom that the idea of God is described in the Bible, not as the expression or the consequence of faith.

Reason, on the other hand, represents the reaction to facts. When it comes to deeds, the problem is that of relating proper means to proper ends. That kind of experience is intelligence, intelligence being defined by John Dewey, correctly, as the proper relationship of means to ends. The concept in terms of which reason functions is nature. Facts constitute nature. Deeds imply techniques. God belongs to human needs. A god denotes any good or value that answers a need. The unique God denotes the fulfillment of *all* human needs.

If Not Now, When?

However, the question as to the needs themselves and the principle with which we have to reckon was expressed by Charles Malik of Lebanon when he was President of the First General Assembly of the United Nations. He said: "There is enough in the world to meet men's needs, but not their greeds." He made that statement in connection with the problem of universal peace. There can be no peace, he implied, as long as men have more wants than they have needs. I would add only one item to Malik's statement. "There is enough in the world to meet men's needs but not their lusts and greeds." This is the principal problem of human life upon the solution of which its very survival depends. Besides limiting men's wants to indispensable needs, there is the ecological problem of limiting them to as much as the environment can provide.

The Jewish people is exceptional in that the name of its God is YHWH, which means that organicity is eternal. The slogan *Shema Yisrael* implies that organicity is a source of man's salvation. Salvation, according to Judaism, demands that human beings strive for world peace, ethical nationhood, and individual happiness. Those should be the purposes of human living, of any life-style or civilization. Those are the purposes which Judaism, or the evolving religious civilization of the Jewish people, conceived first in mythological terms, and which it is now prepared to reinterpret into objective, scientific terms of human behavior. This idea of eternal organicity as divine is the inspiriter of the collective self-consciousness and conscience of the Jewish people. That this should have occurred is due to the fact that the historic self-consciousness and conscience of the Jewish people first experienced the need to be needed on a collective scale for the good of mankind. The idea of the need to be needed, of course, is implied in the promise of God to the patriarchs that their descendants are to be an example and a source of blessing to the rest of mankind.

Merely to intellectualize about the Jews and Judaism will not save the Jewish people.

COHEN. In his notes to his lectures on logic which Immanuel Kant wrote in his Notebooks toward the end of his life, he observes there are four questions. What can I know? What must I do? What should I believe? And the last, What is man? He continued by saying that the question of what can I know is answered by rational metaphysics, *The Critique of Pure Reason*, which inquires into the nature of human understanding and its relation to the objective world. He succeeded in his day in accomplishing for epistemology what linguistics and the philosophy of science have achieved presently, the demythologizing of previous philosophy and the attempt to found knowledge upon the laws of reason. The second question, What must I do?, he answered with *The Critique of Practical Reason* ascribing an ought to human behavior which is founded on a concept of reasonable conduct; and to the third question, What should I believe?, his *Religion within the Limits of Mere Reason* was answer enough, elaborating as it did a conception of God which grounds and insures authority to ethical conduct and offers to it the somewhat doubtful promise of reward. But to the last question, What is man?, there was no answer. He produced no rational anthropology to interpret this extraordinary, complex, hopeful, and frequently miserable creature which is man.

I have no doubt that the subtle and carefully reasoned argumentation which you developed in your preceding statement is absolutely the point at issue. My reservations would not then be reservations of substance because I recognize that built into any conversation such as ours is a recognition that when human beings come with honor and respect to each other, their concern is to reason to a purpose and not finally to score off each other the points of argument. We recognize in common that not alone Jewish civilization but the civilization of the West and indeed the civilizations of mankind are in perilous times. And it is not alone a question of crisis. Crisis is always with the human animal. I cannot imagine a history of human civilization which could not be written in terms of crises and rediscovery, of diminish-

ment and replenishment. It is in fact one of the comforting recognitions about the nature of time and history that there is a self-rectifying duration which enables human beings in the past and *deo volente* in the future to step back from the abyss. We are able to recognize that whether my conception of God as actuality in which the modus of communication is transactional between God and man, or whether we employ your formulation of transnaturalism, which I find perfectly satisfactory to my purposes, we nevertheless recognize that the goal of this discussion is not alone to transmit a body of formal teaching from your generation to the next or for me to redact my doctrine by the demolition of yours. It is rather that we both realize that discourse, when it occurs between human beings, is functional, that it has as its task not alone reconciliation with the purpose of accommodating truths (a morally deceitful compromise since it would be dishonest to the truth as each of us and others would conceive it) but rather that we are both profoundly concerned that a millennial civilization within a millennial civilization within a civilization of men who may not yet be civilized *can* perish.

Insofar as we regard the Jewish people as a bearer of truth (not alone its possessor), our interest in truth is whether it can alter values and structure conduct in a significant and efficacious manner. For my purposes I have no difficulty in accommodating to your formulation of transnaturalism, since the functional end of conversation, of any kind of speaking between men, is reconciliation. We both recognize that the truth about which we wish to achieve greater clarity is finally in the direction of consensus. Consensus, in your terms, means an acknowledgment of the plurality of truths; consensus for me would entail a recognition of the combative character of truth but the essentially pacific ends of human life; namely, that truths conflict but that human beings must not destroy each other for the truth. From this perspective, I would have to acknowledge that your judgment of the underlying thesis of *The Myth of the Judeo-Christian Tradition* is

correct. It is my belief that the task of thought within religion consists in the giving and meeting of truths which are essentially combative, entailing as they do the conflict of ideas and ultimately the conflict of men whose orientations toward what is true about the nature of reality (reality here defined as truth about God, man, and the world) are radically in opposition.

I recognize that in such a view I stand back one step further than you from the pragmatic issue. For you it is continuously a question of pressing truth into action, whereas I demand an ongoing refinement of the truth which, however much it does not delay action, certainly makes the action more ambivalent and ambiguous than it would be for you. The reflexivity I require entails rather more self-scrutiny and self-preoccupation than is relevant to the social function of truth. But again this is more by way of modification than of disagreement because what is clear to me is that we both recognize that when truth comes to the margin of action it is no longer propositional truth about which we talk; it is functional truth. It is, in the formulation that is becoming more and more characteristic of contemporary philosophy, operational truth, and operational truth more often than not is not metaphysical truth but truth about human behavior. Consequently, I can have nothing but admiration for the skill and imagination with which you steer between the Scylla of intellectualism and the Charybdis of behavioral totalitarianism. Both are a disaster for man because both fragment the true complexity of human nature.

There is one thing, however, which strikes me with considerable surprise, observing as I do a curious reversal in your thinking. The reversal arises I suspect more as a passion of language than a real reversal of thought. (What is evident to me, and I confess this with unabashed admiration, is that I have never encountered before the witness of such continuity, strength, vigor, and consistency of character. There comes through to me continuously the feeling of the most profound effort to be open. In fact, I would imagine that that really is the

definition of wisdom, that one does come to the point where one can bear to be open. One of the arbitrary defects of youth is that it requires upon being closed before it has had the experience of being open.) I am particularly moved, therefore, by the fact that I am accused—and I use “accused” in the nonpejorative sense—I am accused of an over strenuous preoccupation with truth; and you introduce the term salvation, a term which has always been subject to the most strenuous demythologizing in your own historic work but which now you use in an almost pure sense, namely, the assumption by man of a responsibility to history, a responsibility to fellow man, and a responsibility to self. Put in other terms, since those would indubitably be ethical terms, it is an obligation which every man takes to himself, if he has character, to make his history meaningful, his relations with his fellows meaningful, and his relations with himself meaningful. Ultimately salvation is really a question of meaning—meaning not in terms of propositional truth, that is to say, knowledge about the world, but operational truth, namely, knowledge of what can I as a human being know, what ought I as a human being to do, what may I hope for, and what is man all coming together in a concern that the individual should reach his manhood and that the human race should reach its maturity.

Religion, if you will permit me to gloss your comments, emerges as having the essential function of providing a source of coherence to the quest for meaning. I can understand your conception of God as eternal organicity, although I find that formula as needlessly intellectualist as you find my putative supernaturalism obscurantist. I think of God not as eternal organicity but as the source of coherence, coherence in nature, coherence in history, coherence in values. In consequence, I think of religion as the medium by which the source of coherence is given the life power to enable men in human associations and in society to interact one with another, society with society, nation with nation, to achieve common goals.

Thinking as I do that God is the source of coherence and

religion its articulation, I believe the prophets made absolutely clear that however much human beings might misuse the best within their nature, that best remained permanent, immutable, and a given. The conscience can be ignored, but conscience can never be obliterated. There is always a witness to conscience. This, of course, is one of the functional characteristics of the Jewish people, that we are a people who insist upon bearing witness.

KAPLAN. One of my strongest convictions is that religion alone can be a source of ethics. A true conception of God as functioning constitutes human wisdom, not faith. It should be the source of our understanding of human behavior, of operational truth, as you put it. Without experiencing the reality of God through the medium of one's people, Kant's intellectually reasonable approach affords no basis for ethics. His idea of ethics is independent of religion, because the premise of the categorical imperative and its dependence upon the principle of never using one's fellow man as means only as an end in themselves, is for Kant a sufficient basis for an operational ethics.

COHEN. That would be true except for the interesting fact that later in his life when Kant wrote *Religion and Ethics* he revealed a genuine existential terror in the recognition that individual conscience was an insufficient goad to right conduct. Facing up to the capacity of men to do evil, he reaffirmed God as the guarantor of ethical action. In effect he succumbed to the Augustinian streak in his own Lutheran tradition. I have always felt (and Friedrich Heer has documented this problem brilliantly in *God's First Love*) that the Manichean doctrine of evil is perpetuated by St. Augustine in his *Confessions* where he discriminates between men of spirit and demonic men. The kingdom of light and the kingdom of darkness exhibits a moral determinism and perfectionism which undercuts any ethics of freedom. History always defines its demons but has extreme diffi-

culty in identifying its heroes. The real issue with which Kant was struggling was moral dualism. And the only way that he knew of reconciling his pristine, clear, and almost romantic conception of the ethical life with the ambiguous behavior of men was to reintroduce God as the ultimate judge who condemned and praised, who rewarded or consigned to damnation. Ultimately Kant was pushed back to his residual Augustinian Manicheanism, however philosophically rationalized. Such a retreat is, I think, a hopeless impasse for human life.

KAPLAN. The trouble you see with Kant's conception of ethics is that he did not understand Spinoza well enough insofar as Spinoza succeeded in deriving ethics *more geometrico* from his idea of God. I personally do not subscribe to Spinoza's identification of God with nature because God is for me always trans-natural. We must so conceive of God as to realize that we must be honest, that we must be responsible, that we must act justly, that we must be loyal. These are the four basic principles of ethics. Take, for example, the idea of justice as defined by Karl Marx, namely, that each human being give of his best and receive that which he needs in order to be able to produce his best. That idea itself implies that a human being is a segment of an organic social whole, that he must experience the need to be needed, the need to transcend himself or, in traditional terms, to experience a sense of holiness in life—and, of course, holiness means God. The same is true of honesty which is operational truth. In order to act the truth, we must experience the sense of being needed as a member of an organic society which prescribes laws based on the assumption of honesty as a means of human communication.

We have in the Bible the most remarkable adumbration of what is verified by scientific experience, that experience which takes into account not only facts and deeds, but also human needs.

I think we now understand each other. We are now pre-

pared to take the next step which you suggested in our previous discussion. We must now begin to specify the detailed activities, types of organization, ethical ideals, all of the contents of a life-style or civilization which deliberately and successfully achieve that which Jewish civilization at its very inception dreamed of, which would constitute the purpose and destiny of the life of the Jewish people and the motivation for the attempt to resurrect it, namely, world peace, ethical nationhood, and individual happiness.

COHEN. I would agree with you and I think probably this is as good a point as any to suspend for the day.

I would want, however, to specify even more particularly in further reversal of roles the programmatic prospect before us, your challenge, not only to me (since we're not challenging *each other* directly but are addressing challenges to a common impasse) but to the Jewish people. You have spoken consistently of the resurrection of the Jewish people. The premise of such a formulation is that in some sense you regard the Jewish people as already dead. The predicament, of course, much more to the point, is that the Jewish people is utterly confused. It is confused in the most profound psychosocial sense. Its motivations are unclear and in conflict. Much of its social cohesion and instinct to tribal herding resulted from millennial adversity and violence which, following the Holocaust and the establishment of the State of Israel seems to have been overcome or, at least, contained. Clearly the Jewish people if it wishes to endure in health, cannot continue to endure upon the presumption of the destructiveness of alien societies. No society can retain its wholeness, certainly not its sanity, under such a continuous devastation. The source of Jewish self-identity, the identity that makes a people, cannot any longer remain the threat of disaster.

We turn then, it would seem, in a much more positive vein (and precisely because positive more desperate, since it is one of the tragic facts of the Jewish unconscious that it is historically

programmed to wince at reality) to confront our historical reality. We are a people who have been trained to feel threatened. We have never been trained to be secure. And clearly any destinarian conception of a people cannot be predicated upon threat but must be founded upon a sense that what it must do is right in itself and that it has no choice but to do it. Such a view is the condition of sanity and health, not of threat and virtual insanity. I think therefore that what we must address far more specifically than such general concepts as peace, ethical nationhood, individual happiness are the procedures of reconstituting a people that appears at this moment to be morally fragmented, ideologically distressed, religiously, if not impoverished, surely confused.

September 30, 1971

KAPLAN. In trying to crystallize the result of our cooperative thinking I realized that I have been remiss in my attempt to set forth the case for transnaturalism as against supernaturalism. My main argument against supernaturalism is based on the fact that the very term "God" is not a substantive but a functional noun, and therefore does not denote a being that would have to be supernatural to be designated God.

As a term for function, God may denote some fact that is part of reality that can best be described as transnatural, in the sense that it is exceptional in character and therefore transcendental. Such is the case with the experience of holiness, which derives from the principle of organicity, which I have previously defined as the totality of a being greater than the sum of its parts. Holiness is thus a fourth dimension of human experience, the other three dimensions being truth, goodness, and beauty. Consequently, the term "God," insofar as it functionally denotes the experience of holiness, is a transnatural concept, which applies to the experience of conscience. Conscience is something more than consciousness, and collective conscience is something more than collective consciousness.

Now I come to the point wherein I have been remiss. I

stressed the idea that YHWH was the collective consciousness of the Jewish people to account for the fact that many Jewish cultic practices which are ascribed to God are known to have been instituted by the ancient Jewish sages. However, to be exact, such an institutive process is the result not of collective consciousness alone but of collective conscience. My remissness, therefore, consisted in having failed to stress the fact that the personal name YHWH denotes the conscience of the Jewish people, and not merely the consciousness of the Jewish people.

COHEN. I gave up the notion of God as supernatural long before you allowed me to give it up. I employ the term supernatural in a principally atmospheric sense, as a term intended to describe the domain which God inhabits—a curiously inept and finally inaccurate mode for speaking of that which is ultimate in the universe. Consequently, I would not feel too significantly belabored to surrender the term in return for other terms that seem to be more appropriate.

As I indicated earlier, my original use of the term “supernatural” had as much polemical force and intention as it had original theological and discursive power. It was intended by me to pull the discussion of Jewish religious thinking back to substantive issues out of the ellipses into which history had forced it over the past half-century or more. Obviously “supernatural” is man’s term. Under no circumstances could it be God’s term. This is to introduce another consideration, namely, that the predicament of man in thinking about ultimate questions, and particularly in thinking about ultimate questions which he believes to have substantive reality, requires that man think as though he were other than himself, as though he were in some sense co-participant in the life of God rather than a man over and against and vastly inadequate to the ideas that he conceives. Consequently, there is a built-in difficulty in using the term “supernatural” since it immediately reveals the patent of its origin; it is a human consideration by which to describe

the experience of that which is so ultimately holy as to be completely unlike the human. But no less is the case, as you have pointed out and as the literature certainly makes abundantly clear, all of the manifold names which God is called are derived by analogy from the totality of human experience—God as king, God as father, God as shepherd. What are these but analogues to the most immediately tangible natural experiences of human life—but natural experiences of human life transcended to a different plane of meaning, which is to say God cares like a shepherd, but is not the shepherd that one meets on the way. He is the unique shepherd, contains and expresses and offers the full reality of being shepherd or being king or being father or being compassionate or being just. All of the language in which we speak about God is ultimately imperfect language not because it is metaphoric or poetic but finally because it is language forged in a kind of humility that realizes it is never adequate to the experience it designates or seeks to designate.

I would certainly back off, rather more than I would have in the past, from a polemical stance of the supernatural and return to a language that is more compassionate to the possibility of language. Language cannot hope to explicate the experience, for it works from an analogy of nature and the natural experience of man. Ultimately what one must contend with is that a religious language is, as Karl Jaspers suggests in *Die Philosophie*, a cipher. Jaspers analyzes a variety of human experiences which he describes as boding the transcendent, as ciphers of transcendence. Within the finite are concealed those indices which point beyond themselves. In Jaspers' thought the cipher is different from what we normally mean by symbolic language. In symbolic language, the symbol must have as much clarity as the referent, the symbol being different from a metaphor in that a symbol is not merely an analogue of the thing designated but does point to one aspect being symbolized. The symbol is actually a partitive denotation of reality.

The predicament of theological language, of religious life

in general, is that we are engaged with an ultimate reality for which there is no empirical ground other than the ground of our particularized sense of reality. We speak then as Jaspers does, in a cipher language of transcendence. Our significant life experiences point beyond themselves to a more complex reality, reality which is larger than the individual self or, if the community, larger than the community or, if a civilization, larger than the civilization, comprehending and including them all. These experiences, whether they be the experience of authenticity, the experience of death, finitude, anxiety, or the experience of beauty or of holiness are in themselves indices of a reality which is transcendent to man and incomprehensible to him. I would, in concluding these remarks, say that I accept the viability of the notion of the transnatural or transcending action of man. Man is, by definition, a creature who cares to transcend his nature. Perfectly clearly this would discriminate man from any other form of life. Man is not only the creature who poses ultimate questions (which no other creature can do); he is also the creature who realizes what the Greeks meant by *ekstasis*—*ekstasis* meaning to throw one's self beyond one's self—ecstasy. *Ekstasis* is to move one's self beyond one's self and this is what we mean by transcendence, particularly so when it has some incarnation in the community, when it is being in community that seeks to resolve the questions of life, to ask the questions of life, to find points of focus that enable him to ask and to have viable answers to questions of ultimate meaning. "Supernatural" is not and has never been a really workable term. It was a term that was introduced into theology in order to describe realms of nature rather than realms of human experience. When the term "supernatural" began to emerge in the translations of medieval texts, what was clearly being indicated was the consciousness that man was a creature too impoverished, too imperfect, too corrupt to inhabit a universe with God. Obviously this has never been the impetus of Jewish tradition. Precisely the opposite. The real conundrum of Jewish tradition is that man *must* inhabit the universe with

God and, in fact, not only *must* but, by virtue of that necessity, has obligations to live in such community with God. That is to say the realms of nature could not be discriminated in terms of hierarchical organization, for where is God? Is he above? Is he below? Is he near? Is he far? Is he here? Is he there? All of these indications, every one of which the Psalmist regarded as appropriate, became inappropriate in medieval theology because the notion of levels of the universe—hells, purgatories, heavens, natures, supernatures, subnatures—became issues by which the medievals, in a rather arbitrary and unknowing sense of nature, had to describe the impoverishment of man and the absolute character of divine grace.

This is no longer an issue for me.

KAPLAN. There is just one point, however, I wish to stress in answer to what you have just said. According to your statement, we might as well say transcendent instead of transnatural, or ecstatic, to indicate that we go beyond nature. The advantage, however, in the use of "transnature" is the fact that, although we go beyond nature, we must reckon with it. In other words, the usual idea of a conflict between religion and science has to be reckoned with, namely, that whatever spiritual or religious idea of that fourth dimension of holiness that we entertain and try to work with, we must reckon with the laws of reality. Therefore "transnature" is an appropriately positive term, whereas "transcendent," like "supernatural," is merely a negative term.

COHEN. Well I wouldn't say it is negative, and I don't think you mean that. I see, however, the point you are making.

KAPLAN. I mean it does not indicate the direction, or the way, in which we have to operate with the God idea. Your very concluding remark that the entire world of religion must be a world that is indigenous to human nature and the actual historical

If Not Now, When?

facts of human nature would be ignored in the term transcendent.

COHEN. I would say we need both terms. I wouldn't want to give up one for the other.

KAPLAN. Well in a sense, of course, for the sake of clarity, I also have used the term "transcendent." In fact, I arrived at the idea of transnature from the idea of the need for transcendence, which I have equated with holiness.

COHEN. I think what you are saying is apt, but quite clearly, unless one is using images from classical apocalyptic literature which neither of us is particularly inclined to employ, we can hold the notion of man as a creature who perfects himself toward the ideal of God. That is what we really mean by self-transcendence—transcendence within the forms of nature but, nevertheless, in the perfection of the natural condition of man. On the other hand we cannot, unless we are working from apocalyptic molds, speak about the perfection of nature itself. We do not imagine that a tree can be a more perfect tree than it is, but we can imagine that a man can be more of a man than he is. Nature does not have values. Man is the creature who has values. He prizes things beyond what he is.

KAPLAN. Nature, too, in my opinion transcends itself in that every natural entity, whether vegetative or animated, is more than the sum of its parts.

COHEN. Yes, and so?

KAPLAN. It really fulfills itself, and fulfillment is self-transcendence.

COHEN. All that I am saying is that every realm of nature

has its entelechy. The blade of grass grows to its full form and is fulfilled by its form. On the other hand a blade of grass cannot exceed more than its form. It doesn't have to.

KAPLAN. Entelechy is the exact equivalent of the trans-natural. Soul like mind is the perfect realization of the living body. Likewise, cosmic God is the perfect realization of nature as a whole.

COHEN. What you are acknowledging is that all things have entelechy but man is the only creature that may have the will—that has to have the will—to fulfill its entelechy. In other words it is not part of the nutritive function of man to have values, whereas it is part of the nutritive function of a leaf to grow to fulfillment or die.

KAPLAN. Exactly.

Now that we understand each other in our transnatural conception of God we are in a position to deal with the most urgent problem of Jewish survival, that is the question of Jewish identity. Judaism and the Jewish people are at present in a state of crisis which is a juncture on which depends a transition to better or worse. The most dangerous symptom of such crisis is the fact that even our leaders and scholars admit that they do not know "Who Are the Jews?" That is the title of a chapter in so authoritative a work as *The Jews, Their History, Culture, and Religion*.*

In answer to the question what are the requirements of Jewish identity, I would say that Jewish identity may be spelled out in two well-known mottoes of Judaism which call for a meaningful interpretation. One is Hillel's maxim, "If I am not for myself, who will be for me? But if I am only for myself,

* 3 Vols. Edited by Louis Finkelstein. (New York: Harper & Row, 1960; Schocken paperback, 1970-71).

If Not Now, When?

what am I? And if not now, when?" The other maxim has its source in the kabbalistic Zohar which I venture to rearrange somewhat in keeping with the last part of Hillel's statement, "if not now, when?" The original statement in the Zohar reads: "The Holy One, blessed be He, the Torah, and Israel are one." I would change the order and put Israel second rather than third.

The implication of the first part of Hillel's maxim is that the Jew, as an individual, must reckon with his individuality, with a sense of freedom which he must not renounce nor even play down. He must insist upon his right to do his own thinking and to refuse to be brainwashed. That implies that whatever faith he is to exercise, particularly in religion, must not be blind nor founded upon what might have been only an illusory experience recorded in tradition as authentic. There is room, however, for faith, either as hope or as an assumption which may turn out to be true. The Hebrew word *emunah* which, according to the prophet Habakkuk, the righteous live by, is wrongly translated as faith. The authentic translation of that verse (Heb. 2:4) is "the righteous lives by his faithfulness." In the Bible the equivalent for the idea of authentic religion is not faith but wisdom.

The second part of Hillel's maxim, "But if I am only for myself, what am I?," stresses the meaning of spirituality, or holiness, as essentially a matter of self-transcendence and therefore achievable only through belonging to an organic society that is self-governing, self-educative, and self-perpetuating. Being organic, such a society, like all organisms which manifest life, and especially consciousness, are more than the sum of their parts, with each part sharing that incremental plus. The ancients had a word for self-transcendence. That word is "holiness."

Objects in the heavens above or on the earth beneath or in the waters beneath the earth served the ancients as a focus for their collective consciousness, which they regarded as a god. Our ancestors, the ancient Hebrews, refused to regard any visible object as worthy of being a rallying focus for their col-

lective consciousness. They did not make use of totems. They made use of the *name* YHWH, which meant eternal identity, as implied in its equivalent, "I shall ever be what I am." That is to say, what actually afforded our ancestors a focus for their collective consciousness, as well as their collective conscience, with its sense of holiness, of Godhood, was the universal order of nature with its manifestation of law and order in an organic society like a nation, a people, a tribe, a clan, or even a family. It was Rachel, not Jacob, who stole her father's house idols.

As for the third part of Hillel's maxim, "if not now, when?," that refers to the fact that one's general outlook on life and nature as a whole must find expression in the age in which we live and be related neither to some remote past nor to some imaginable utopia. Hence, whatever a person draws upon from the past as a source of inspiration and guidance has to be relevant to one's life and experience.

As regards the kabbalistic maxim which defines Jewish identity, the expression "Holy One, blessed be He" suggests that the term God must not be understood as a substantive noun like "man" but as a functional noun like "king." A substantive noun calls to mind something visible and tangible, whereas God as king of the universe is to be identified as that organic aspect of the cosmos which is manifest through the laws of nature as a whole. Belief in the existence of God in that sense is the first requisite of Jewish identity.

A second requisite is so to conceive God as to realize that God needs mankind of which to be God. Thus we read, "I YHWH am your God [your collective conscience] who brought you out of Egypt to *be* your God." For a Jew to be able to conceive God in those terms he must sense fully to what extent, as a Jew, he is an integral part of the Jewish people. To achieve that experience, he must have absorbed enough of a Jewish education so as to be familiar with the history of the Jewish people, with its ideals and hopes and with its sense of

If Not Now, When?

destiny, as well as with its achievements and its failures, so as to have those achievements and failures incorporated into his own consciousness.

Nowadays, what happens to a child that is brought up in a Jewish atmosphere within a family that transmits its Jewish heritage is that when he grows up and establishes his own home, he will experience the need for world Jewry to reconstitute itself as a functioning organism, with Zion as the spiritual center for such functioning. The most important factor to be reckoned with is Torah. In terms of our modern universe of discourse, Torah is itself that social heritage in the process of being transmitted.

In order for Jewish education to be a source of fulfillment or salvation, it must reckon with the fact that the human mind evolves, as men's needs multiply and means are found to satisfy those needs. If those new needs are to be satisfied, the spiritual education of a human being must include the transmission of the tradition not in its own terms but in those of Hillel, the third element of which is "If not now, when?" That is contemporaneity. The reason Judaism and the Jewish people have managed to survive, despite adversities which no other civilization, country, or people has survived, is that its tradition was always reinterpreted to meet the intellectual, social, and spiritual demands of the age in which we lived. Ongoing interpretation is ongoing education. This process is one which Jews have to foster and develop as an indispensable means to the creative survival of the Jewish people, to the promotion of ethical nationhood, and to the establishment of world peace, as well as to individual salvation, self-fulfillment, or happiness.

COHEN. I think we have really turned a corner in our conversation, not a sharp corner, but one that is graduated and rather more subtle. I, at least, find myself in a position to raise questions at this juncture rather than formulating counter or contrary propositions. It seems to me that at the very heart of

your programmatic thinking (and we are certainly moving in the direction of a programmatic application of terms and concepts that have been developing in these conversations up to now) there is implicit one basic concept about which I would have questions, not denials or demurrals but only questions. Your essential premise would appear to be consistent: that there is in the relationship between the Jew and Jewish civilization, Jewish civilization as a civilization convoked by the need of God for a people, the assumption that these relationships are changing relationships. You introduced the notion of contemporaneity, but you introduced the notion of contemporaneity in a rather different way than most "reformers" of Jewish tradition have used the term. You employed it not in discontinuity from a frozen past but in continuity with a living past. Essentially then, if I understand you correctly, what you seem to be saying is that Judaism has always been an evolving civilization. Unlike the argument of the early reformers of the nineteenth century who, in looking back on classic Jewish tradition and Jewish social institutions as they had been established in Gaonic times, took the position that there had to be a break, a real dissolution in order somehow to objectify the corpus and determine which parts of that body should be allowed to live and which should be stricken. This is not your position. You have always argued, and you are arguing now, that Judaism is an adaptive civilization, but what do you understand to be the relationship between tradition and growth? What in fact is tradition in your thinking? What is the dialectic relation in your thinking between tradition and growth, or between God as eternity, YHWH as eternity, and the temporal experience of man which is one suffused by time, riddled by a sense of indeterminacy, uncertainty, both hope and frustration. I would like you to speak to this question of the relation of tradition and change, eternity and growth, as part of the dialectic of the transnatural.

KAPLAN. Your observation that I have introduced into the

conception of Judaism the element of evolution requires further explanation because the historical phenomenon of adaptational change in Jewish life for purposes of Jewish survival is identified with the Reform movement which is generally conceived as having broken with the past. In the first place I wish to correct that general conception of the Reform movement. It was not intended nor has it effected a break with the past. Actually it regarded itself, and with justice, a development out of the past. The only difficulty with its conception of development was that it divorced the indissoluble connection between values and facts. The change which it has been trying to introduce into Jewish life failed to reckon with the fact of the continuity of peoplehood, of being the same people as created the Bible. They committed the error, therefore, of interpreting Judaism as a religion instead of as a civilization, which of course is something that I tried to change with the publication of my book *Judaism as a Civilization*. What is noteworthy is the fact that the Reform movement itself has actually accepted that change in its conception of Judaism. The Columbus Platform of 1937 is a break with its own original Pittsburgh Platform of 1885. It now emphasizes peoplehood and Zionism as an integral part of Judaism. I have a letter from the then president of the Central Conference of American Rabbis, the late Felix Levy, proving that it did so under the influence of Reconstructionism. That, in a sense, answers your question.

COHEN. If I understand you correctly, then, the one thing which must be pre-eminent in any thinking toward a reconstitution of the Jewish people is the fact that the people is an eternal entity of Jewish existence. That is to say, there can be no Jewish existence in denial of the Jewish people. The Jewish people is the substratum which sustains the qualities of Jewish existence in real growth, development, tension, exploration. Clearly from my recollection of the argument of that most original reformer, Moses Mendelssohn, you're absolutely correct, historically cor-

rect, and I think theologically correct as well. The first "crime" against the eternity of the Jewish people was the effort of the early *Aufklärung*, the early reformers, to split off religion from the Jewish people, to make of Judaism a confessional or cultic religion rather than a religious civilization in which it would be impossible to discriminate between the identity of the Jew and the role of the religious life in that identity. I think this is an important point because certainly in any definition of a programmatic posture for contemporary Judaism one would really have to understand what it is that constitutes the minimal conditions of membership in such a civilization. I would only caution, from my own moral and social sense, that even the term membership strikes me as being inapt and inappropriate, because Judaism is not a club; it is not a society that is defined by rights of accreditation and approval administered by a board of overseers. Ultimately, participation in the life of the Jewish people is finally an act in which consciousness comes together with conscience. It is something, therefore, which neither takes place by fiat nor transpires by an act of joining, in the sense in which one joins a political party, a social movement, a revolutionary cell.

I think, therefore, what we have to do is define what we mean by the almost coeval, instantaneous juncture of consciousness and conscience, on the one hand, and the eternity of the people on the other. I believe we have to explore here the idea of covenant—what covenant means as the primary historical and existential reality of Jewish life.

October 1, 1971

KAPLAN. It is important for us to give thought, at this pivotal junction in our discussion, to the specific function of the Jewish God idea. This function, as I conceive it, is radically different from the philosophical or Hellenic interpretation of the God idea. The God idea of the philosophers has only an intellectual function. It is intended to reckon with the problems of cause and effect, of meaning and purpose. On the other hand the God idea of the Jews has a threefold function: political, self-educative, and self-perpetuating.

In the first place, it has a definitely political function in that it calls upon the Jewish people to be self-governing and not to submit to the government or laws of any other people or nation, unless they function in keeping with the standard of justice translated into law (cf. Gen. 18:19). It is for this reason that Rome interpreted the religion of the Jews as being politically competitive to its own hegemony and, in consequence, forbade the putting of purple thread on the fringes of the tallith and later executed Jesus for claiming to be the divinely appointed king or Messiah of the Jews. Secondly, as a means to their being self-perpetuating, the God idea of Judaism calls for the transmission of their spiritual heritage from generation to

generation, so that there be no generational hiatus. Thirdly, the Jewish God idea was associated with a covenant relationship between God and the Jewish people. This was intended to remind the Jews that, even if they failed to render their self-government ethical, God would not reject them but change their minds or impel them to repent and return to him, thus forcing them to be loyal to him. These three functions of the Jewish conception of God have kept the Jewish people alive to this day.

COHEN. We are indeed looking forward to a programmatic consensus which will make possible common sources of action as well as a shared sense of purposeful action. We have passed through abstract conceptualization and have entered the domain of history. We have entered the domain of history in that we are now thinking out of the historical situation of the Jewish people rather than trying to find conceptual formulations that can serve as preconditions to such thought. But I think it relevant to introduce into our communication an elaboration of a terminology which maintains a more efficient connection, to my mind, with the kind of conceptualization which we have developed heretofore and which nevertheless enables us to function, if not with pragmatic efficiency, at least with fidelity to the notion of transnaturalism which you have introduced (and to which I give conditional assent) or to my notion of transactional religion, which leaves open the question rather more than your position allows as to whether we confront God who is present in our lives as an idea or God who is present in our lives as a self-subsistent independent reality. I am willing for purposes of programmatic impetus to bypass, at least for our purposes, further scrutiny of substantive theological questions since, finally, our conversation is intended not to resolve disagreement but to illuminate it. I think we've come a long way in accomplishing that.

Let me then pick up the major term in your thought that

points to a real fact, namely, that there can be no such entity as a people without self-consciousness or self-awareness. Self-awareness and self-consciousness entail the virtual presence within the life of the people, seeded in its unconscious memory and historical associations, of the possibility of self-transcendence. Self-transcendence means not only the personal, existential experience of reaching beyond one's self to that which is greater and encompasses more than one's self, but also suggests the historical experience of a people reaching beyond its two-dimensionality to a dimension of destiny which is the motive planted in its midst (as the phrase "eternal life planted in our midst" means that God as eternity is planted in our midst). As God is in the midst of us, so is destiny become our motive.

Having no demurrer, therefore, from the concept of people consciousness, I would like to speak about it from my perspective. I think it necessary to distinguish between history, culture, and civilization. They have for me an order of rank which is not simply hierarchical but developmental.

It is inconceivable that a people can be civilized without a culture and it is inconceivable that a people can be cultured without a history.

One would have to begin, therefore, with the notion of historical continuity as the precondition to culture and culture the precondition to civilization. History taken in its flat, perspectiveless two-dimensionality is essentially unreasonable; it does not contain within itself the logic of reason. What it contains is the meeting of men, ideas, and events which disclose partial meaning. History is reasonable only because men make it so. By this I understand that all men have a history which is selected and winnowed from the memory of the past.

Human beings have a deformed history to the extent that they have a defective memory of their past. Human beings behave rather too often on the presumption that historical events are meaningful only because they made it so; this imposes upon history the arbitrary will of the autonomous individual, whereas

the logic of history is founded upon men cohering with each other; and out of the experience of human coherence arises the awareness that they share a common history. What I am, therefore, arguing for at the outset is that history is meaningful only to communities, to communities of men who describe a shared history out of a common past. History has no autonomy to the individual. It is merely an inert body from which I or you or any other man selects events, moments, ideas, conceptualizations, visions which appear to be personally relevant. But personal destiny is different than either the destiny of history or the destiny of communities.

Culture I regard as shared continuity which is only a possibility offered up by history but which requires the enthusiastic commitment of living men to bring into existence. This is not to say that there are not dead cultures, nor is it to say that there are not decadent cultures. No less is this the case of the Jewish people who have the precondition of history as shared past and also a culture as shared continuity, that is, shared interpretation of historic events. Culture is an interpretation of history.

And lastly, civilization. I would define the preconditions of civilization as culture sustained in tranquillity and peace—tranquillity which is internalized and peace which is the normative condition in which life is lived. Obviously a civilization under continuous threat is one that has not reached or could not reach the maturity which is tranquillity. And I don't regard tranquillity, and I hope you understand me, in a negative, quiescent sense. I regard tranquillity as the awareness of the spiritual and as the simultaneous presence of the image of destiny and the life that the people live. It is what you referred to previously as normalized existence (not normal existence since none of us wish to be normal, but we insist upon the conditions of normalization). Normalization I take to be tranquillity.

You spoke earlier with great feeling and instruction about the soul of nature—nature has an entelechy. Both the Greeks and the Hebrews understood that nature has form. The Greeks

understood the soul of natural objects in a completely biopsychological sense, whereas the Hebrews understood it as an *inspiratio*, as something breathed into nature by a spirit which sets nature in motion and articulates its form. We must regard every individual living creature as having a personal entelechy. The psychosocial entelechy of every human being is his maturity, a mature existence, completed or interrupted only by death. We have no completed image of the realized entelechy of a man until he completes the round of his life, until his life ends. One could no more say of an adolescent genius that he had reached his fulfilled entelechy than one could say of an immature old man that he had completed his. Entelechy is then to be understood as the maturity of the self. But if we can speak of the entelechy of individuals we should also be able to speak of the entelechy of civilizations. I would like, therefore, in this context to introduce into our discussion a term which, like many terms in the history of theology, has been freighted and weighed down by incrustations and barnacles of misuse, but which nevertheless retains significant values. The Greeks introduced the word *eschaton* (and its derivative, eschatology) into Western theological thinking in order to describe a civilization with a vision of its consummated end. Traditional theology has always regarded eschatology as referring to the fulfilled end of time in history—that is to say, the moment at which history passes away and the *malbhut shammayim* begins, whether the kingdom of God be understood in political terms or whether it is understood as in late Jewish thought as meaning the end of days in which the Messiah of Joseph is succeeded by the Messiah of David. Familiar eschatological thinking employs a quasi-mythological world of fulfillments and abnegations, realizations, denials, consummations, and wiping away of imperfections.

For our purposes I would like to redefine the notion of *eschaton* in such a way as to give both urgency to the reconstitution of the Jewish people, as well as to indicate that it is a concept which bears within it an awareness of the pathos of

the historical and a notion which might quite as easily have been articulated by Koheleth the preacher, that civilizations come to fruition, die, and pass away. We must reckon with the possibility that the Jewish people at some moment in the historical future may well have fulfilled its task. That is to say, we must envisage the possibility of a realized ethical nationhood and world peace. In such an eventuality—distant though it be—the Jewish people will have fulfilled its destiny. It can then become a normal civilization among other civilizations, unagitated by the desperate urgency to bear witness and to maintain its covenantal solidarity. However, to achieve that *eschaton* is the task of a civilization that stays alive. The *eschaton* is not the last thing for time, but the *eschaton* may well be the last thing for the Jewish people.

I realize that there is substantial movement in my own thinking engendered, in fact obligated, by the power of these conversations. Until now, that is to say during the past twenty years of my own thought, the position that I held was profoundly messianist without finally being messianic. I held to a position which made effective human action, particularly effective ethical action, virtually impossible, since all action was measured against a standard so absolute and so unbearable in its remoteness that any kind of visible change in human behavior or any visible transformation of the Jewish people was ruled out of account. I recognize that my reservations about Zionism (whatever their value as reservations) put me in the position of being unable to recognize the immediacy of Zionism as the intermediate growing step in the development of Jewish civilization.

KAPLAN. What you have just said translates into terms of social psychology the threefold function of the God idea. Toward the beginning you analyzed history as a sense of destiny and all from the standpoint not of philosophy but of social psychology, the science of human behavior on a collective scale.

On the other hand there is a value, very much so, in the philosophic approach to the God idea in order to validate the principle of religious pluralism. If one tries to understand the God idea in philosophic terms, one is likely to give expression to a conception of God which differs from that of those who hold on to the traditional idea of God or have a different philosophy of life. And that is the main ethical significance of democracy as implied in Hillel's saying, "If I am not for myself, who will be for me?" It is the right to individuality.

We are at one from every standpoint of the God idea, which is fortunate because it renders our dialogue creative. Each of us begins to see his own past approach in a new light. He does not reject it, he qualifies it, which is in keeping with the hope I had when we began this dialogue—I looked forward to it in order to qualify my own ideas in the expectation that you would do likewise.

Particularly I am interested in your subsequent remarks about the *eschaton*. Of course, *eschaton* is a philosophic idea, and being a philosophic idea and not derived from social psychology, it conceptualizes entirely in terms of individualism and not of collective human life.

COHEN. I don't agree. I was at pains and apparently failed to clarify sufficiently that I was redefining the usage of eschatology and its employment as a social-political destinarian concept.

To reformulate, I would say that every person has an entelechy which is to be mature, that the task of the mature self in collectivity is to be the bearer of ethical witness to society. And in that sense I think that no individual has an *eschaton*, only communities have an *eschaton*. That is to say, civilizations have implicit tasks which for civilizations mean maturity. I would not by any means deny the contrast, indeed the contrariety, between civilizations. In fact what makes human life and history so indescribably rich is that civilizations do

compete. They have competing visions of the universe. One can speak of Teutonic or Chinese or Muslim civilizations as a complex of religious values, cultural sensibilities, and indeed all of the *materia* of civilization. Hebrew civilization, Jewish civilization, is only one among many. But being one among many does not mean there is not a mediate eschatological function for that civilization which consists in its struggle to give birth to a larger community, a community that will, in my terms, embrace in tranquillity truths that are mediated to it by particular self-governing, self-educative, and self-perpetuating civilizations. I am not trapped in an autonomic doctrine or a doctrine of radical individualism, but am much closer to your concept of pluralism. I recognize a plurality of *eschatons* and a plurality which as each comes to fulfillment, gives way to a synthesis that embraces it and allows it to flourish, hopefully, in a more generous fashion than we or they or any other civilization in the passion of its militant self-definition feels obliged to present itself before the world. There is no question that there is always a tension between autonomous individuality and social responsibility of the collectivity, but the individuality of the collective and the social tolerance implicit in the plurality of collectives is a tension which allows for maturity to come to pass. I recall with great feeling the observation of the late Jesuit Father John Courtney Murray at a gathering of Protestant, Catholic, Jewish, secular intellectuals under the auspices of the Center for the Study of Democratic Institutions at which Father Murray spoke about the idea of social consensus in a democracy as being a conspiracy, and then having shocked us all by the use of the term "conspiracy," in such a seemingly benign context, proceeded to illuminate the origins of the word as being *conspiratio*, that is to say, breathing together, not breathing in opposition, not breathing in secrecy, not breathing in intolerance, but breathing together. This is the significance I ascribe to the mediate *eschaton* of the Jewish people, the mediate *eschaton* of democratic pluralism—a conspiracy on behalf of mankind.

If Not Now, When? ``

KAPLAN. What you're saying now is simply a more emphatic and more articulate way of saying what I was going to say about you. Namely, that in all of this you have departed from the philosophic approach and have been availing yourself very definitely, as did Father Murray, of a psychosocial standpoint. This is all I was trying to say, but you put it more emphatically.

October 5, 1971

KAPLAN. Before proceeding further I wish to call your attention to what you have helped me to achieve, namely, to prove that the Reconstructionist movement is a Jewish ecumenical movement. Ecumenism marks a new development in the function of spiritual leadership, which is that of being a guide to the perplexed. In the past the assumption was that political unity was impossible without religious conformity. The political function of the spiritual leader was to convince those who disagreed with him to accept his version of religion.

Nowadays, when democracy demands that there be religious pluralism, the problem of political unity is how to establish among different religious groups a common universe of discourse as a means of communication and interchange of ideas. The function of the Reconstructionist movement is first and foremost to establish a common universe of discourse among all Jews, believers and unbelievers. It follows that whatever denomination of Judaism to which one belongs, he should conceive of Judaism as a religious civilization and not merely as a religious philosophy or doctrine. There is room for difference on the question of its being an evolving civilization. From all that you have said I note that you agree with me even in that regard.

We are, therefore, in a position to discuss a program of action on behalf of world Jewry.

COHEN. Essentially, I have no objection to the way in which you've formulated your opening remarks. However I would want to call to your attention an ongoing difficulty which I feel morally impelled to clarify. I think there is a certain sense in which even Reconstructionism as a position mediate to existing sectarian and denominational character of Jewish life, trifurcated as it is between Reform, Conservative, and Orthodox, is also falling into the predicament of being an ideological position which has become, in many respects, less a haven of criticism and witness to a spirit of free discourse that has to be reintroduced into Jewish life than itself a position which is as rigid and formal as those it criticizes. What I'm pointing to is that if Reconstructionism is a success; its success is that it has reopened an order of question which has heretofore been regarded as closed and frozen by the two extreme postures of American Judaism, Reform and Orthodox, and accommodated more ambivalently by what Solomon Schechter regarded as historical Judaism in its conservative rendition. The problem always is how do you keep the living waters flowing. This is the deepest problem of religious life. The danger of Reconstructionism, or for that matter any formulation of Jewish life which is both profoundly ecumenical (reconciliatory) as well as *parti pris* in that it has an obligation to perpetuate and disseminate a teaching, a practice, is that its freedom is too general and its real doctrine, however scientific and rational, is presented as party position. I would regard Reconstructionism as genuinely an ecumenical movement had it been constructed along the lines of Franz Rosenzweig's *Lehrhaus* experiment in Frankfurt than along lines which proposed and established basic alterations, demurrals, excisions, elaborations in the established tradition.

All positions, to my mind, have to be kept open. The problem is how does one have an evolving civilization that depends

upon continuity, coherence, consensus, standards of participation, notations of excellence and goals and at the same time grant maximum option to the individual Jew to be if he wishes strictly observant or unobservant while no less regarding himself as fully participatory in the consensus which is Jewish civilization. I cannot, therefore, travel this final bit of the road with you, for however much I understand your view of Reconstructionism as a Jewish ecumenical movement, I find increasingly in its literature a sense of self-defensiveness, a self-conscious awareness that it is dealing with a world that has not received it quite as it believed it should have been received and, in response, its development of all the characteristic symptoms of any denominational movement that is trying to grow and is struggling for its life. The genius of Reconstructionism in its earliest formulation, in your earliest formulation of it, was that it was a movement that insisted upon raising questions from a foundation of a highly contemporary, vivid sense of the psychosocial condition of modern man. It was, in its original impetus, functionally naturalist and as a result critical, in the deepest sense, of established postures in American Jewish life. Today what bothers me is that it is represented too often as a position in competition with positions, and therefore it has come to exhibit all the marks of ideology and with ideology estrangement, resentment, annoyance at being misunderstood, etc. A movement that is a teaching movement can teach *always*, but a movement that insists as well upon a *praxis* and a *docta* has the same difficulties and limitations as any ideology, notwithstanding its conviction of being up to date and modern.

KAPLAN. I was able to see at once the basis of your argument when you mentioned the name of Franz Rosenzweig. His conception of God had its source in philosophy and metaphysics. My conception of God is entirely derived from social psychology. The advantage of such derivation is that at least there is some reason to believe that when we disagree about concepts,

there is still shared between us a practical concern for improving concrete situations in need of remedy. That is not the case when an idea of God has its source in metaphysics. If you have a different metaphysic there is no way of achieving a common denominator. On the other hand, if one's conception is based on science and social psychology, there is hope and possibility for those who disagree, since their disagreement does not prevent unity of action.

It so happens that the particular scientific, socio-psychological basis which is the source of the Reconstructionist approach is validated in the two aphorisms to which I have made frequent reference in the course of our discussion. The one of Hillel affords a purely objective, scientific basis for proceeding to the understanding of what is meant by God. Secondly, insofar as the Jewish trinity is concerned, God, Israel, and the Torah, all the elements of a civilization are set forth. I believe, therefore, that by speaking of Reconstructionism as an ecumenical movement I remove the objection which you have just raised.

COHEN. I think the extenuating remarks that you have made are to the point; however, for me the source of religious truth is not alone in metaphysics. Nor might I add was it the sole source of religious truth for Rosenzweig. What is clear from the course of Rosenzweig's life is that the procedures by which one makes one's way back into a natal community are as various as the experiences out of which a human being comes. You have indicated in an unpublished autobiographic essay which you showed me that there was never any question for you from the time of your birth that the single community that mobilized your attention, that illuminated your childhood, was the coherent, self-sustained (in your terms self-governing, self-educating, and self-fulfilling) Jewish community of a small town near Vilna. Franz Rosenzweig certainly did not have an integrative option available to him in his home town of Kassel, Germany. Nor

would I have had it available to me growing up in Mt. Vernon, New York. Nevertheless at that point in Rosenzweig's life at which he came to maturity, or to this point in my life in which I came to maturity, there is the ability to think beyond the conditions of one's origin. The progenitive experience from each of us come to Jewish life will of necessity be different.

The authenticity of any ecumenical movement is its ability to embrace Jews from any background. There was immediacy and spontaneity in your childhood; whereas a reading of Rosenzweig's letters indicates that his early youth and manhood was spent in the most exasperating struggle to locate an identity as a Jew within a German culture that was Christian and hostile. My childhood environment no less, although differently than Rosenzweig's, was highly secular in character, not at all defined by primary Jewish values or preoccupations. It became necessary for me to gerrymander the superego. Conscience and values had to be found; they were not given except in the guise of aggressiveness which only betrays the value instability of the giver. Finally, where we are still able to stand together is not in how we enter the conflict of life and history but how we determine to come out of it. And at that point the concern for a realistic programmatic awareness of the crisis of the Jewish people, of the necessity for accommodating great varieties of intellectual, philosophic, and religious postulations in the interest of a common identity is something about which we have no disagreement. My only demurral would be if you insist that I give a specific name to the ideological consensus which enables us to function together as Jews seeking the reconstitution of the Jewish people. I would no more wish to give the name Orthodox to my position than I would wish to give the name Reconstructionist. Essentially what I am arguing for is an end to ideology and a beginning to living community. Do you see?

KAPLAN. Yes I do see, but at the same time I disagree with what you have just said, and I shall try to account for my

disagreement. It is one thing to do something on principle but it is another to do something on principle without recognizing consciously the principle by which you do it. To give an illustration from my own experience, all that you said regarding the origins of my attitude toward religion is true in that it has led me to interpret religion in terms of its social function and not in terms of its individual intellectual function.

However, I went through the following experience. The first sentence in my journal dated February 24, 1913, reads, "Religion is primarily a social phenomenon." It took years of studying and teaching religion since then until Sunday, October 3, 1971, for me to spell out the psychosocial vocabulary of the social function of religion. There's a difference. And I have naturally been reinforced in my approach to religion as a social function because I find a basis for it in our tradition, in the main ideas that dominate it—such as that expressed by Hillel and implied in Kabbalah. And for this reason I feel we can know more what steps to take on the basis of science, the science of human behavior, than on the basis of philosophy or metaphysics. Without such basis there is no common element for establishing an ecumenical enterprise in Jewish life which would consist in practical attention to specific needs, because the nature of need itself is not then sufficiently understood.

COHEN. I think you're confusing two basic terms. Forgive me for offering a minor dissent. You can have ecumenicity without unanimity. I think what you are rigidifying in your opposition to me is more hard-line today than it has been previously in our conversation—namely, the contrast of science as a body of observational, empirical information about the human animal and philosophic or metaphysical questions. A source text is the observation of Plato in the *Theaetetus* that all philosophy begins in wonder.

There are really quite contrary but reconcilable needs in the human animal. There is the need for a great variety

of immediate required gratification of both a biological and a social character, but at the same time the essence of the religious life, whether it is conducted in community, whether it is conducted as personal adventure, is essentially the preoccupation of men that the experience of living have meaning and value which is capable of transcending their own life. The predicament of all doctrines of immortality used in support of ethical conduct results from the fact that the promise of immortality is not an efficient good because, finally, human beings cannot project the image of immortality, and to employ immortality as the groundwork for ethical action, is a useless, infantile motivation to right action. But no less is the case of someone who has no image of what it is that he wishes to leave behind him, whether "leave behind" in the quantifiable terms of a material culture or "leave behind" in the aspirations that he transmits to children or "leave behind" in the dreams of his finished and unfinished work—whatever, we are always dealing with a recognition of transitivity which human beings somehow project upon the universe. The life task is really one of establishing a groundwork for one's self, for one's people, for one's community, which is of ultimate relevance, enduring beyond the self and defining the gift which one's life makes to the unending enterprise. I don't see, therefore, any need for a radical apposition between science and the metaphysical inquiry; or, put another way, I regard the synthetic unity of the appetite to do with the appetite to know and understand finally conjoined in the religious community. Religion is a social phenomenon, but only to someone who is outside of it—not to someone like yourself or myself who is within the phenomenon, who is not only reactive to culture but creative in culture. The synthetic unity between the scientific description of human behavior and the passion for meaning must be brought together, and are finally brought together in any ongoing self-perpetuating religious community. Without *both*, they die. If Judaism were to have continued much longer, maintaining a doctrinal posi-

tion bounded by the *halakhah*, irrespective of the fact that there are millions of Jews who live by that structure, we know perfectly well that by the middle of this century the acculturation of the Jewish people in the United States would have reached the point of no return. Consequently there are things that are holding us together which are not compassed by a behavioristic interpretation of the human situation.

KAPLAN. In my opinion, however, there is a radical difference between the philosophic approach and the behavioral approach. That difference can best be illustrated by the difference between the Hellenic and the Hebraic conception of what makes life worthwhile. As you well know, Socrates maintains that the unreflective life is not worth living. If I were to sum up the idea of religion, authentic religion, I would say it maintains that the irresponsible life is not worth living. Of course, responsibility has to reckon with reflection. That goes without saying. But the function of religion is not reflection. The function of religion is responsibility. We depend upon social science to know how to discharge our responsibilities. We cannot get that from reflection.

COHEN. I think you're stuck in a logical *petitio principii*. The religious life pre-existed the determinations of social science and the efficiencies of religious communities antedated the techniques of social psychology. Obviously they were doing something right without knowing the sources of their doing it. Our predicament now is how to make explicit (without a false scientism) the application of insight which we can now derive from social science, social psychology, the study of human behavior and human organization to effect a more responsible life.

KAPLAN. But you see, that is exactly the point I am making. The problem before us is not merely to define Judaism; our problem is now to improve Judaism, because Judaism is sick,

socially sick, suffering from schizophrenia. It's a socio-psychological pathology.

Let us now apply what I believe to be in common between us to the actual situation of world Jewry. It is one that should give us great concern. Its condition is far from that of health. Let us not be reluctant to state the bitter truths that follow the example of Senator Fulbright's description of the American situation. He had the courage to describe it in the words "The great society, a sick society." By the same token let us face the fact that world Jewry is presently a sick people. Our purpose should be not to give expression to a sense of fear and apprehension, but to learn what has to be done to restore world Jewry to spiritual health. The malady which at present afflicts world Jewry—its schizophrenia—is within the domain of psychosocial therapy. Its schizoid condition is in reverse analogy to that of Old Man River in the musical comedy *Showboat*. He there describes himself as "tired o' livin' and feared of dyin'." The case with us Jews is the reverse. Jews in the State of Israel are tired of dying. Jews in the Diaspora are afraid of living. The Jews in the State of Israel are tired of being the victims of man's inhumanity to man. They are determined to achieve the kind of nationhood which our ancestors promised themselves ever since they recalled the threefold promise God had made to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob that all the families of the earth would wish themselves nothing better than the good fortune which had been promised to the patriarchs. God had promised the three patriarchs would be the inheritance of their descendants. But the Jews in the State of Israel have not the least idea of how to achieve that kind of nationhood. Traditionally, it was a religious nationhood, but the Jews of Israel do not know what to make of Jewish religion, especially how to think about God. They cannot possibly accept either the creed of Maimonides or that of the Conservative movement. The fact is religion is not an answer to an intellectual need but to man's need to be needed. It is not a matter of reflection but of responsibility. Israeli Jews

should, therefore, try to achieve a conception of God that is not only believable but that might impel Jewish nationhood to be spelled out into ethical self-government, individual responsibility, and universal peace.

To achieve such a conception of God, it is neither necessary to philosophize nor to contemplate but only to learn enough about social behavior to experience the need for self-transcendence in order to become fully human. The ancient term for self-transcendence was holiness. God is thus that life process which adds to human experience the fourth dimension of holiness, without which the other three dimensions of truth, goodness, and beauty are unachievable.

What then is the source of the experience of transcendence, or holiness? The answer is the organic unity of a human society, such as a family, a clan, a tribe, or a nation. Each such unity implies that what is thus united is more than the sum of the parts constituting it. Such organic unity is made possible in human life through the law and order to which every member of a family or nation must submit. The organic unity of ancient Israel was elicited by the Temple with its holy ark which contained the tablets upon which were inscribed the Ten Commandments.

How could that "law and order" which is to be the conscience of the Jewish people and its impetus to self-transcendence operate? The answer the Torah gives is the following: self-government, self-education, with a view to self-perpetuation. Each of these forms of functioning is stressed in the Torah so conspicuously and so emphatically as to leave no room for misunderstanding. The revelation of the Kingdom of God as "law and order" is limned in the story of the three wayfarers who were entertained by Abraham as he was sitting in the heat of the day outside his tent. One of those wayfarers was none other than YHWH, and the other two were angels who were to function as witnesses of the crimes for which the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah were to be destroyed. However, YHWH did not allow

himself to destroy them, although he had noted their criminality, without the testimony of two witnesses who visited the cities and reported what they had found there. YHWH is represented in that story as teaching Abraham a lesson in the way justice was to operate. He had chosen Abraham for the purpose of having Abraham instruct his descendants to conduct themselves in keeping with the principle described in Genesis as "righteousness spelled out into law," the way of YHWH, or as we would now say the function of his being a God, namely, responsibility as "law and order." The fact that *tzedakah* means responsibility is evident from the use of that term in modern Hebrew for charity rather than for legal justice, which it meant in ancient usage. Common to legal justice and to charity is the sense of responsibility.

Secondly, the duty of communal self-education is stressed in the command to the parent to impress upon his children the importance of loving YHWH, who represents the conscience of the people of Israel, with all of one's heart, one's soul, and one's strength, and that the parent should talk to the children about it at home, on the road, when lying down, and when rising up. What civilization other than that of the Jews has stressed the sacred duty of transmitting its spiritual heritage from generation to generation as a means of self-perpetuation? This is further underscored by the covenant relation between YHWH and Israel, committing both of them to everlasting union. The covenant relationship plays a very emphatic and significant role in the whole of Jewish tradition. The fact that it is actually translated into a religious rite accounts in large part for the survival of the Jewish people.

October 7, 1971

COHEN. We are approaching the conclusion of our conversations which is, as we both well recognize, an arbitrary conclusion, since hopefully we will go on with these conversations on a more informal basis for some time to come. Nonetheless, for purposes of giving articulate shape to what we have accomplished, we would be well advised now to turn to practical theory rather than continue our strenuous commitment to abstraction in the hope of clarifying those differences which existed between us and illuminating the scale and magnitude of those differences.

The formulation of yours to which I've been giving considerable thought since we talked last is your familiar, almost hallmark, phrase "Judaism is an evolving religious civilization." It seems to me that if we can understand more fully what those three critical terms involve, we may have a more concrete sense of the structure as well as the predicament of contemporary Judaism at this moment. I have always taken the term "evolving," when it applies to a socio-political context, as entailing what many thinkers imply by social Darwinism. However, we are not only involved in social Darwinism; we are involved in something more complex and seemingly more paradoxical, namely,

religious Darwinism, a notion that would involve the recognition that even the forms of the religious life, however hoary with antiquity and traditional in their reception, nevertheless are subject to change, and change responsive to the needs and exactions of human beings who are, in fact, the subject of religious conversation.

It is not for the sake of God that one would seek to alter and adapt the forms of religious life but for the sake of man. From such a perspective we can distinguish within the notion of evolution the difference between change of forms and revision of essential content. What is certainly proposed by any adaptational theory of religion is not that its essential values be altered. One would not wish to substitute aggression for holiness as a new content of the religious life. Nor would one wish to enthrone a pagan chaos in exchange for a perceived sense of structure in the universe. What one is anxious to do at all times is to ensure that the forms enrich the imperishable content as transmitted—viability, immediacy, and relevance to the human subjects of the religious life who are vastly more changeable than the God they worship and, consequently, much more susceptible at this moment in Jewish history to an awareness of fruitlessness, despair, and irrelevance in much of the religious practice of Jewish life.

When we turn to the second term, "religious"—religious set against the background of an adaptational social Darwinism—we find that what we are dealing with is the requirement of developing a substantive program for self-transcendence. Self-transcendence cannot be allowed to be an idle goal of the religious life. It is, in fact, at the very heart of the religious experience, not in the mystic meaning of self-abandonment in order that another self might be achieved nor permitting the existential self to wither under the scorn of self-condemnation and self-reproof, but to allow the development of the healthy ego as the religious ego to achieve expression as an historical ego and thus the conscience of a people.

There is in my thinking an ongoing transaction between the

autonomic self and the objectified self, which is the history of a people. As a result, if we take the two terms "religious" and "evolving," what we find is that we are dealing with the two major foci of civilization, namely, an individual in the immediacy of his concern for value, relevance, meaning, and the self-transcending drive of the person to push toward an historical medium, an historical community, which is viable, adaptable, socially evolving and in a process of change and expansion, extension and fulfillment.

Civilization is then, in such a formulation, the social alembic in which the movement toward change and adaptation encounters the implicit conservatism of religious content, that is to say the idea of holiness. A new fusion occurs, that of civilization. Clearly, a people without members, however it might be a logical concept, has no reality. It is foolish to speak of the Jewish people or of Jewish civilization if there are no Jewish human beings.

Consequently, the continuous dialectic of any programmatic reconstitution of the people must be predicated upon a programmatic reconstitution of individual responsibility toward the people. This is certainly exhibited in the history of the tradition. We have always been referred to as a people of books and texts and one could say, even more to the point, we have always been a people who have at critical junctures in our history found a new adaptational doctrine which enabled us to negotiate the abyss which history opened at our feet.

The redaction of the Talmud was one such moment—an oral tradition conserved according to memory and social custom required its ordering and standardization in order to achieve continuity against the thrust of changing circumstance and the erosion of memory. No less in the period following the expulsion of the Jews from Spain, the visionary contribution of Kabbalah renewed for depressed Jewry the conviction that God still cared about the Jewish people and its exile. Similarly, at the very end of the eighteenth century culminating in the early nineteenth

century, the movement of Enlightenment and out of it the beginnings of the scientific study of Judaism and, in turn, the first movement of readaptation, that of Reform, constituted another breakthrough in the effort to retain Jews in Jewish life who otherwise might have disappeared from loss of contact and continuity.

And lastly, in our own time, coming to fulfillment in the State of Israel has been the movement of Zionism—one more adaptational source-text for the regeneration, holding, and reconstitution of a people pressed by both poverty and victimization to give up.

At this moment we are suffering from two malaises and certainly the abyss is open before us, but as yet the doctrine has not appeared. We are a people who survived only a quarter century ago a psychological, social, and demographic disaster from which most people in the history of mankind would not have recovered. A people which at its peak population numbered only sixteen million can ill afford to lose six million people and survive. And no less we have passed through, endured, and witnessed the natural antiphon to such a disaster in the establishment of the State of Israel as an appropriate response to the criminal depredations of the past war. But, nonetheless, we seem still to be victims at this moment of success, not victims of a sense of failure or a sense of unfulfilled mission, but rather victims of the loss of vitality in Jewish life which has issued from a kind of flaccidity born of two decades of prosperity, security, triumph, and as much as one dislikes, I as profoundly as you, Rabbi Kaplan, a notion of Jewish history which predicates its values and its endurance upon disaster. It is the case within the unconscious conditioning of the Jewish people that the absence of disaster—no, quite the opposite, the presence of continuing triumph and success—has led to a kind of moral smugness and decomposition which in other eras in Jewish history might have been achieved only by disaster. Personal success and communal security in the face of the non-Jewish world has led to an in-

If Not Now, When?

ternal demoralization which, as I said, in previous moments of Jewish history could not have been accomplished other than by external, enforced disaster and expulsion.

Therefore, when we turn to talk about what the new movement for the reconstitution of the Jewish people would look like, we have to renew the earlier terms, namely, the relation between evolution and the religious center in the reconstitution of Jewish civilization. Clearly any evolutionary process has to take account of the conditions of its own times. Not the conditions of its own times expressed by its worst values but by its best.

We are responsible for indicating the formal conditions of twentieth-century life against the background of which it would not be possible to achieve the reconstitution of the Jewish people that we seek. This involves first and foremost a conception of the requirement of pluralism, not simply pluralism in the meaning of the Jewish people as one people centered by values that are not shared by the rest of mankind or are shared in modes and species of adaptation to their own societies but, as well, direct confrontation between Judaism and other civilizations. And yet within the tradition of pluralism as it has emerged in the democratic polity it becomes indispensable that moral discourse and moral confrontation replace the historic aggression that was built up over centuries in the combat between Catholics, Protestants, Jews, Russian Orthodox, and Muslims. The condition of pluralism is not only exterior but interior as well. The Jewish people is not a people without its sectarian position and unless there is a clear recognition of such sectarian doctrine within Judaism and the coming together of Jews to deliberate in concert about the strengths, values, and adaptational concerns of all such sectors of Jewish life, there would be no possibility of moral consensus within the Jewish people.

A second condition is what I would call the transnational character of human society or, in your phrase, ethical nationhood—the responsibility of any people, whether it is a people

among peoples as are the Jews in the Diaspora or a people in its own land which it must share with other peoples as in the State of Israel, the responsibility for achieving a moral transcendence of traditional understandings of nationhood and national sovereignty I regard as indispensable.

And lastly in this nonexhaustive catalog what I call responsible voluntarism, which is to say that we can no longer expect the cooperation, thank God, of history to enforce upon the Jewish people the obligation to remain Jews. What we are confronting in our time is the fact that traditional sources of social coercion are no longer present. On the one hand the Jewish people, with the exception of the Jews of the Soviet Union, are not being coerced into finding and relocating a self-identity. And clearly the procedures by which the *kehillah* in Gaonic times and throughout the Middle Ages to the end of the seventeenth century were successful in ensuring a coerced obedience to standards of Jewish community life no longer carry the same potency and power. Rancors remain nevertheless. That is to say, the world is not yet hospitable to all its members and in Jewish tradition hospitality is notably absent in many quarters. But the fact remains that responsible volunteerism, that is to say, the voluntaristic decision of a free individual to join his life to that of the Jewish people is something that must remain a free option.

These three considerations are all articulated against the background of the last. The center of Jewish life, its value structure, remains substantively unchanged since the time of the Patriarchs. From whatever perspective we consider membership of the individual in the Jewish people—his concern for his own freedom, his joining in concert with others in a spirit of tolerance, his refusal to submit to aggression—there is the implicit recognition that the value center of Jewish life remains unchanged. Our concern, then, is always about values. Values of the individual and the collective conceived as values of salvation. The social utility of values consists in the fact that values can

If Not Now, When?

be made effective in reordering the priorities of genuine culture and civilization and, most immediately, in the recovery and re-focusing of those values in the immediate life of the individual and the collective of the Jewish people. Values have not changed essentially, because God is, in your phrase much earlier in our conversations, eternity, and insofar as he is eternity the values that have been communicated for the sustenance and perseverance of this people have also not changed. They remain finally justice, mercy, and holiness.

KAPLAN. It seems to me that our dialogue has achieved a highly practical result. It has demonstrated that it should be possible to arrive at a common universe of discourse in world Jewry despite the divisiveness of its various denominations and its tendency toward complete secularization. A common universe of discourse is even more important than a common language to maintain a sense of unity among a people or nation. By a common universe of discourse I mean that use of language which enables each concept or general term to convey one and the same meaning to the speaker and the hearer. With the heterogeneity that prevails in the average American Jewish congregation the rabbi may well be expressing very profound truths but his conceptual vocabulary is no longer the same as his congregations. On the other hand, given a workable universe of discourse it is bound to develop among all Jews, however diverse their world outlooks, a sense of spiritual fraternity and mutual responsibility, which is what our Jewish tradition demands of all Jews.

The problem of creating such a common universe of discourse for world Jewry is a problem of achieving unity within diversity and continuity within change. The precedent for such a program of renewal is reflected in the interpretation of the well-known passage in Psalm 119, verse 126. The literal translation given in the Jerusalem Bible reads: "YHWH, now is the time to act. Your law is being broken." The rabbinic inter-

pretation of that text is: "For thy sake, O YHWH, it is time to act by breaking the law." The most unique dimension of the Jewish conception of God is not its monotheism but it is that conception of God as entering into self-committing covenant with nature and with man. A covenant with physical laws of the universe and with the Jewish people. What is the scientific significance of this mythological notion? Evidently the fact of perpetuity under change, under all conditions. The Jewish people is unique in the sense that the ambition to perpetuate itself was uppermost in its self-consciousness from the time that it escaped Egyptian bondage and entered into a covenant with YHWH, who interpreted his name as meaning that he is forever unchanging. The only principle which can enable the Jewish people to create and sustain unity amid diversity is that of Judaism as an evolving religious civilization. The Reconstructionist formula is not an end in itself but a means of reconstituting the Jewish people and reconditioning its educational and social institutions. Only such effort can save the Jewish people from extinction. I am, therefore, in accord with you when you said that what we have come to agree upon is the urgent need to have world Jewry formally reconstitute itself as a self-governing, self-educative, and self-perpetuating people, with Israeli Jewry, Zion, its center and religious culture and ethics the radial spokes of the international Jewish conscience.

EPILOGUE

"AS IRON SHARPENS iron, so does one man sharpen the wits of another" (Prov. 27:17). That sums up my experience as a result of having invited Arthur A. Cohen to engage in conversation with me. It was that which I had expected when, in my opening statement to him, I referred to the likelihood of having to qualify my own views as a result of my engaging in conversation with him concerning a topic on which my heart had been set—the reconstitution of the Jewish people. I had thought that if I could convince Arthur Cohen who, in his writings on Judaism, stressed his supernaturalistic approach, that the reconstitution of the Jewish people was a matter of immediate urgency, the likelihood of its coming to be generally recognized and acted upon as such was an assured fact.

Fortunately, my intuition has been confirmed. That came about as a result of our having managed to build a bridge between our contrasting attitudes toward Judaism—the supernaturalist vs. the naturalist—the bridge being transnaturalist. So that when it came to formulating the title of our conversations, I suggested "And If Not Now, When?" and he added. "Toward the Reconstitution of the Jewish People."

To such an extent have my own wits been sharpened as a result of our conversations that even their momentum has impelled me to further sharpening. I believe I have at last arrived

Epilogue

at a full understanding of the difference between the philosophical approach to religion, which accounts for Cohen's originally supernaturalist approach and my own originally humanist approach. He regarded the belief in God as a result of individual contemplation, whereas to me the belief in God is the result of collective action; hence, his philosophical approach to religion in contrast with mine, which is sociological. To him, the goal is knowledge and self-understanding, to me the goal is action. My purpose was to find out whether I could win him over for action.

In the meantime I have arrived at a further clarification of my own sociological approach. I asked myself, "At what point does the Jewish collective consciousness become the Jewish collective conscience with which the tetragrammaton YHWH is to be identified?" The answer, as developed in the course of the dialogue is "at the point at which the Jewish collective consciousness becomes aware of the *unchanging character of the relationship between God and Israel.*"

By this time, however, it occurred to me that the more exact equivalent of the tetragrammaton YHWH is *eternality*, particularly in the sense of adherence to law which, when internalized, becomes ethics or morality. Thus, we read in Hastings' *Encyclopedia of Religion and Ethics*, under the concept "Loyalty," the following: "We find in *post exilic* Judaism the supreme example of a people held together by allegiance to the law—the law embodied in a written code that he who runs may read. . . . Externally the Jewish people had many masters; internally—in his own mind—each pious Jew spent all his loyal sentiment on the law of his God. . . . The Psalms and the Prophets abound in expressions of this loyalist spirit applied to the Supreme Law" (cf. Ps. 119:33 ff.).

And now, accordingly, my latest version of Judaism's clarion calls, the *Shema Yisrael*, "Listen, people of Israel, Eternality is our God, only Eternality."

MORDECAI M. KAPLAN

ABOUT THE SPEAKERS

MORDECAI M. KAPLAN was born in Lithuania in 1881 and came to the United States as a child with his family. He was educated at the College of the City of New York and Columbia University and was ordained rabbi at the Jewish Theological Seminary of America. After serving as rabbi of the Orthodox congregation Kehilath Jeshurun, he was invited to organize and head the Teachers Institute as a department of the Seminary in 1909. After 35 years of service at the Teachers Institute, Professor Kaplan helped establish, in 1946 in Los Angeles, a university of Judaism, based on a idea which he had promulgated. Rabbi Kaplan has always been active in Jewish community life and was organizer of the first synagogue center. He also founded the Society for the Advancement of Judaism to further the cause of Reconstructionism, and served as its leader from 1922 to 1937. He is the author of many important books, including *The Meaning of God in Modern Jewish Religion*, *The Future of the American Jew*, *The Purpose and Meaning of Jewish Existence*, *The Religion of Ethical Nationhood*. The major statement of his philosophy of Judaism is found in the now-classic *Judaism as a Civilization*.

After receiving a master's degree from the University of Chicago in 1949, ARTHUR A. COHEN attended the Jewish Theological Seminary of America where Professor Kaplan was one of his teachers. Mr. Cohen has been editor or publisher of a number of major publishing companies, is a contributing editor to *Judaism*, and has served on the advisory board of *Congress Bi-Weekly*. He is a regular contributor to a wide range of periodicals and is the author of several books, including *The Natural and Supernatural Jew* and *The Myth of the Judeo-Christian Tradition*. He has also published two novels, *The Carpenter Years* and *In the Days of Simon Stern*.

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